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AND STARK, RAVING TERROR!**

ASYLUM

BY WILLIAM JOHNSTON



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SYLVIA SYMS • RICHARD TODD

JAMES VILLIERS

Produced by

MAX J. ROSENBERG and MILTON SUBOTSKY

Screenplay by

ROBERT BLOCH

Directed by

ROY WARD BAKER

FROM CINERAMA RELEASING

ASYLUM

BY WILLIAM JOHNSTON



A NATIONAL GENERAL COMPANY

ASYLUM

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Although it was still afternoon, the heavy rain and thick fog had turned the day as dark as night. Sheets of rain whipped at the windshield of John Foster's small car, making the wipers almost useless, giving him only glimpses of the wild, desolate countryside and the narrow, deserted road.

A serious and determined young man, Foster gripped the wheel grimly, rejecting the prodding of his better judgement to stop or turn back. It was his nature to see a challenge through to the end, no matter what the obstacles. A few moments later his persistence was rewarded. Through the lashing rain and billowing clouds of fog he saw the entrance to the side road he had been told to look for.

As he turned the car into the lane there was an explosive crackling. The sky burst open and a brilliant firebolt of light illuminated the entire area. The lane, he saw, was a wallow of mud, lined by ancient, towering trees, their autumn leaves glinting gold and orange for a split instant in the sudden flash of lightning.

Then the darkness closed in again. The car slithered sideways in the mud and Foster fought the wheel to keep it on the road. The fog rolled at him in great, gray boulder-like configurations and landed silently against the windshield. He had the feeling that he was the only human soul left in a world that was being punished for its sins by a holocaust of nature.

Once more the car skidded. Foster had to stop it completely to keep it from sliding off the road. With his foot still jammed against the brake pedal, he waited for an opening in the grainy grayness that surrounded him. Light split the sky again. In the flash he saw the iron gate. It was tall and spiked, glistening black in the rain.

In low gear he drove forward. Momentary breaks in the fog gave him glimpses of a high, forbidding stone wall. At the gate he halted the car again. Squinting through the windshield he saw a gold-plated plaque affixed to the wall and read the inscription:

DUNSMOOR

B. Starr, M.D.

Peering past the iron gate, Foster made out what appeared to be a small guardhouse. He sounded the horn. A beam of light came from the guardhouse, then a stooped, hobbling figure draped in a poncho emerged carrying a flashlight. The figure unlocked the gate and

approached the car.

Foster rolled down his window. The grizzled face of an old man appeared at the opening. His eyes were vacant, as if there were no mind behind them, as he stared in at Foster. With the rain beating down on his shaggy head and aged face, he had the look of a drowned corpse.

“I’m John Foster. I’m expected.”

The old man continued to stare at him blankly.

“I have an appointment with Dr. Starr,” Foster told him, impatiently.

Without responding in any way, the old man left the window and hobbled back to the gate. Slowly, laboriously, he opened it, then signaled with the flashlight for Foster to proceed. Shifting into low gear, Foster drove forward again, following a gravel drive.

He could see little of the grounds. But he was impressed by what was visible to him during the brief flashes of lightning—broad sweeps of lawn and ancient, thick-trunked, windblown willows. It was a setting that encouraged serenity.

In time, the main building came into view. It was a mammoth old country house, built of rough gray stone and trimmed with brickwork. Getting nearer, he saw that the windows all were barred—a fact that caused him pain because of his belief that psychiatric patients had unusual difficulty escaping from their torments when they were treated as prisoners.

Foster parked at the entrance, then got out of his car and dashed up the steps to the portico. Out of the rain, he paused for a moment and looked back across the grounds. But fog shrouded the view, hugging the ground, completely obscuring the outside world. Even though the temperature was mild for fall he felt a certain coldness in his bones.

The door to Dunsmoor was massive, with huge iron hinges and a heavy iron knocker. Foster lifted the knocker, let it fall, and heard its thunderous boom echoing through the house. He listened for the sound of footfalls. But there was only silence. Then, as he was about to knock again, he heard the click of a latch and the door began to move.

A middle-aged woman in a nurse’s uniform stood in the opening. She was large and robust-looking, with a cold, Sphinx-like expression.

“I’m John Foster. I have an appointment.”

“Yes,” she replied, nodding slightly. “Doctor’s expecting you.” Her voice and manner were masculine, emotionless.

When Foster entered the foyer, the nurse pushed the door closed behind him. Getting out of his raincoat, he looked about. The interior

of the house was rich with dark, polished stone and mahogany paneling. The furnishings were solid but luxurious, the tables heavy and gleaming in the subdued light, the chairs and couches covered in brocades and silks. Just inside the foyer, looking incongruous amidst all the opulence, there was a utilitarian metal desk and straight-backed wooden chair—evidently the nurse's station.

"This way," the woman said, after Foster had hung his raincoat on a hook of the coat stand.

She led him across the large sitting room toward a broad, carpeted stairway. But just before reaching it, she halted at a door to the right of the steps.

"Here," she said. "Doctor's waiting."

"Shall I just go on in?"

For a second, the woman stared straight into his eyes, as if peering beyond them, deep into the far reaches of his psyche. Then abruptly she answered with a curt nod, turned away, and walked in the direction of the metal desk.

Feeling somewhat uneasy because of the reception he had received so far—first at the gate, now from the nurse—Foster opened the door. The room he found beyond it looked more like a study than an office. The walls were covered by shelves that were jammed with books. The furnishings were much like those in the sitting room except that here the chairs and couch were leather-covered. The only indication that it was a functioning office were a set of file cabinets and a cork bulletin board to which a number of official-looking notices were thumbtacked.

"Dr. Foster?"

The voice, thin and cutting, came from behind the broad, dark oak desk. The man who had spoken appeared to be in his fifties. He was conservatively-dressed, even to a vest. The doctor was balding and wore gold-rimmed bifocals that rested low on his narrow nose. An acutely curved pipe was resting in his ashtray. A folder containing papers was open on the desk in front of him.

"Yes," Foster replied.

"Forgive me for not rising," the man said, smiling fleetingly. "I'm at a slight disadvantage," he explained, pushing himself back from the desk a bit and raising a leg.

Foster saw that his left ankle was bandaged and that he had a slipper on the foot. "An accident?" he asked.

"You might call it that," the man replied, lowering the leg. "Carelessness, actually." Once more, he smiled briefly. "Never turn your back on a patient," he said. "They still teach that in school, I

suppose?"

"Yes, they do, Dr. Starr."

The man shook his head. "I'm Dr. Rutherford," he said. "Lionel Rutherford."

"But I understood I was to see Dr. Starr."

"I'm his associate," Rutherford told him. He motioned toward the chair directly in front of the desk. "Sit down, sit down ..."

"I sent my credentials to Dr. Starr," Foster said pointedly, making it clear that he preferred to talk to the head of the institution personally. A Senior Houseman, the position for which he was applying, was entitled to that courtesy. "When I answered your advertisement, I was told he would be interviewing me," he added, settling in the chair.

"Yes, well ... Dr. Starr and I are equals here," Rutherford replied. He leaned forward, looking at the papers in the folder. "I've been reading your resume. Unfortunately, it doesn't tell me what I need to know ..."

Foster frowned, puzzled. The information he had sent had seemed quite complete to him.

"Your background is sound enough," Rutherford went on. "Sound enough, that is, to set up psychiatric practice in some fashionable neighborhood in the city." He chuckled dryly. "Open an office, furnish it in French Provincial ... wealthy old women ... hold their hands and listen to them tell you about their horrible husbands ..." He raised his head and looked squarely at Foster. "We're a long way from that out here," he said.

"That's obvious."

"Not just in distance," Rutherford said. "In attitude—in thinking." He motioned toward a barred window. "This is not a place where we play polite and proper games," he said. "This is an asylum for the incurably insane. Not the slightly disturbed. The incurably insane. We don't hold hands here."

"What *do* you do?" Foster asked tightly.

Rutherford wagged a finger, signaling to him to come to the desk. When Foster complied, he showed him a metal box with buttons attached to the underside of the desktop.

"This, sir, is the most useful item of equipment we have here," Rutherford told him. "It's the control system for the door upstairs. No keys, just an electrical device. It's what separates 'them' from 'us.' No one can open that door from either side unless I press a button."

"If you're telling me that some of the inmates are potentially dangerous," Foster replied, going back to the chair, "you needn't worry. I've dealt with disturbed patients."

"By what methods?"

“Kindness,” Foster said, sitting down again. “Understanding. Insight.”

Rutherford sighed wearily. “My ways exactly—twenty years ago,” he said. “Now ... well, twenty years later, I’m not so sure. Time can be quite unkind to confidence, Dr. Foster. The more you learn, the less you know.” He raised his eyes toward the ceiling. “Those poor devils upstairs. They can’t be cured, only confined. The only thing we can really do for them is keep them from harming themselves or others.” He looked away. “All my years of training, all my years of practice, and that’s about the size of what I’ve learned.”

“Is that Dr. Starr’s opinion, too?” Foster asked.

“Dr. Starr is upstairs now,” Rutherford informed him.

Foster could not find a connection between his question and Rutherford’s answer. “He’s working with a patient, you mean?” he asked, puzzled.

“No. I mean that Dr. Starr is a patient.”

Foster peered at him closely, trying to determine if he was being facetious. But Rutherford’s expression was coldly serious.

“Dr. Starr attacked me the other day,” Rutherford told him. “It happened suddenly, no warning. That’s how I got my injury.”

Still somewhat stunned, Foster continued to stare at him narrowly, questioningly.

“Is it so inconceivable?” Rutherford asked.

Foster thought for a moment. “No, actually, it isn’t,” he finally replied. “Working closely with the mentally disturbed can lead to a breakdown—I realize that. I just ...” He sat back in the chair. “I just wasn’t expecting anything like this. I know things of this nature can happen, but when they do ...” He gestured feebly.

“My nurse came to my rescue, fortunately,” Rutherford continued. “Then she and my orderly managed to subdue Dr. Starr. I haven’t been able to get upstairs since.” He indicated his injury. “Can’t handle the steps, not like this.”

“Hasn’t he had an examination?”

“The orderly up there gives me reports,” Rutherford replied. “He says the Doctor appears perfectly rational now except for one thing. A totally new personality seems to have taken over. No more Dr. Starr. Now we have a completely new person up there. New name, new life-history.”

Foster leaned forward again, interested. “ ‘Hysterical fugue’ it’s called,” he said.

Rutherford shrugged. “A label ... meaningless ...”

“On the contrary, it happens,” Foster insisted. “From time to time, a

man disappears and he's found much later living in a different town, using a different name, doing different work. Investigation usually turns up the fact that something happened in his earlier life that made it intolerable to him and he ran away from it to start all over again. And when he's located, he's forgotten his previous life altogether. He fully believes that his new life is the only life he's ever had."

Rutherford smiled mischievously. "Fascinating, Doctor. Do you think you could recognize a case like that?"

Foster hesitated a second, then replied, "Yes, I'm sure I could."

"No doubt in your mind whatsoever?" He examined Foster narrowly. "It's easy to be positive when nothing depends on it. But if it were important to you to recognize such a case, do you still think you could do it?"

"I've studied cases like that," Foster replied confidently. "They're not really difficult if you know what you're doing."

Rutherford snorted. "Textbook brilliance. Very well," he said. "Let's make it a test. There are several patients upstairs of the sort you describe. Go up there. Talk to them. If you can pick out the one who is—or was—Dr. Starr, I'll consider you qualified to be our Senior Houseman. Fair?"

"It's a little unorthodox," Foster replied, feeling a sudden warmth in his face.

"Aha! Where's that confidence, Doctor? Leave it back at school in a textbook?"

"I accept the test," Foster told him. "I'm sure I'll recognize him."

Rutherford smiled teasingly. "Him? How do you know that Dr. Starr is a man?"

Foster felt tricked and somewhat foolish. "I just assumed ... You referred to Dr. Starr as 'him,' didn't you?"

"No, I did not." Rutherford looked at the papers in the folder again. "I can understand why you would leap to that conclusion, though. Your background—childhood—growing up—very comfortable. All the right pegs fit into the right holes, eh?" He faced Foster again. "You find it difficult to believe that a woman could be the head of an institution such as this?"

"No, not hard to believe. Surprising."

Rutherford laughed. "Now, you're convinced that Dr. Starr is a woman," he said. "Doctor, if I were a wagering man ... But, I'm not." He turned his attention to an intercom on his desk and depressed a switch. "Last chance to change your mind," he said to Foster.

"No."

A gruff male voice came from the intercom. "Yes, Doctor?"

“Reynolds,” Rutherford said into the mechanism, “I’m sending a young man upstairs. Foster ... Dr. John Foster ... Now, listen carefully. We’re going to put Dr. Foster to a little test. Here’s what I want you to do ...”

Listening as Rutherford instructed the orderly, Foster felt a cold perspiration break out all over his body. He had the sensation that he was somehow being used. The conversation between Rutherford and Reynolds, the orderly, sounded almost rehearsed. It was as though they were going through the motions of setting up a hoax that they had planned well in advance. But, perhaps he was wrong. Their easy give and take could be the result of nothing more than the fact that they had worked together for a long while and had learned to anticipate each other.

Closing the door to Dr. Rutherford's office behind him as he left, Foster looked toward the entranceway. The nurse was not at her desk. He remembered that Rutherford had said that the woman had rescued him when he was attacked by Dr. Starr. That might be an indication that Starr was a small man—or a woman. On second thought, though, he decided that the fact would be of no help at all in helping him recognize Dr. Starr. The nurse was undoubtedly strong enough to handle almost anyone, no matter what size.

As he started up the steps, Foster's attention was drawn to a series of framed engravings that were hung on the wall along the stairs. By the time he reached the third engraving he realized that they depicted the symptoms of insanity and the means of treating them in the Georgian era. Intrigued, he returned to the first engraving and began the climb again, going slowly this time.

In the lower picture, a bewigged young man, clearly mad, was standing in front of a mirror, his fingers at the corners of his mouth stretching it in a hideous grimace. A young woman, probably his wife, was peering fearfully into the room from behind the half-open door. Foster felt compassion for the pair, one insane and viewed with fear, the other unable to comprehend that insanity was an illness, not a curse put on her mate by a vengeful god.

The second engraving showed the young woman inside the room. She was observing as an elderly physician with an ear to the young man's chest listened for the sounds of the demons he was sure were inside the patient. The young man, oblivious to the examination, was sticking out his tongue at his own image in the mirror. And the physician, while listening, was at the same time indicating with a gesture, a finger to his head, that his diagnosis was insanity. Foster felt anger—a rage directed at the physician, who was mocking his patient while examining him.

In the next picture, the young man, his face flushed, his wig askew and his clothing twisted, was being dragged from the room by two burly grooms. His wife, her face buried in her hands, was sobbing convulsively. The scene mesmerized Foster. He seemed to be a participant in it, not merely an observer. He felt the young woman's grief as strongly as if it were his own.

Advancing, Foster's anguish became more intense. In the fourth engraving, the young man was being thrust savagely into a cell that

already held other victims of society's fear of insanity. Wild-eyed men and women in rags, their faces contorted in idiot grins and leers, welcomed him into their midst. Foster experienced the young man's bafflement, his inability to understand what was being done to him and why, and he wept.

Bafflement became dumb rage as Foster proceeded. The young man—or was it Foster himself?—was standing on a crude wooden table in the center of the cell. His wig was gone, replaced by a paper crown. The other inmates danced about him, cackling and hooting, pointing and taunting. Foster felt his shame, his frustration, his seething desire to strike back at the madmen and madwomen who were ridiculing him for being mad like themselves.

In the sixth engraving, the young man, raving, frothing at the mouth, was being strapped into a straight-jacket by the keepers of the madhouse. Foster tried to raise his own arms to beat off the keepers with his fists, but he could not lift them from his sides. Moving on, he struggled to free himself, and the harder he fought, the tighter his invisible bonds became.

As Foster reached the final picture, a weary resignation overcame him. He could now lift his arms again, but he no longer had any desire to. His rage had been smothered. In the engraving the young man was now old, his body gaunt, his face a cadaverous mask. Still strapped into the straight-jacket, he was also chained to the wall by the neck. Society at last was safe from him. It had isolated him almost completely. His only company was a rat.

Foster dragged himself up the rest of the steps, fleeing from the engravings. Reaching the landing, he rested, leaning against the wall. He felt drained, completely exhausted in mind and body. As his physical strength slowly returned, his mind began an inquiry into the experience he had just gone through.

Had Dr. Rutherford somehow sent him back into the past to learn firsthand about the anguish, confusion, and rage felt by those wretched souls pictured in the engravings? But how? Hypnosis? Had the engravings in some way taken the place of the dangling pendulum that hypnotists used to lure the subject into the hypnotic state? No, impossible.

Most likely, the hallucination, if that was what it was, had been of his own making. He had known for some time about how strongly he identified with the ill. When they suffered, he suffered. Wasn't it reasonable to assume, then, that he had put himself in the place of the young man in the engraving, sharing his madness with him? Surely, that was the answer.

Having an explanation, whether it was the right one or not, helped

Foster recover from the ordeal. Feeling strong again, he looked along the second floor corridor. Facing him from several yards away was a massive iron door with a grilled opening. He thought he saw a flicker of movement from behind the grill.

Foster discovered when he reached the door that it had no knob, no handle, no knocker. He put a hand against the flat iron surface and pushed. The door did not give. He put his face close to the grillwork and looked in. A face on the opposite side of the door was looking out. For a moment, Foster and the other person stared at each other, eye to eye, silent.

Then a male voice, sounding somewhat amused, came from inside. "Dr. Foster, I presume ...?"

"Yes."

The face disappeared from the opening. Foster heard voices but could not make out what was being said. There was a buzzing. Then a creaking sound. The door was opening.

A large, healthy-looking middle-aged man in a white coat greeted Foster, smiling amiably. "Good to see you, Doctor," he said, extending a hand. "I'm Max Reynolds."

Foster shook the hand. "My pleasure."

"If you'll come in ..." Max said.

Foster moved through the opening. At the same time, Max spoke into an intercom attached to the wall, telling Dr. Rutherford that the visitor had arrived.

Foster heard the creaking sound again, then the iron door clanged closed behind him. He glanced back at it.

"It keeps the drafts out, as Dr. Starr used to say," Max commented.

Foster smiled thinly. "Well, you know why I'm here, so ..."

Max nodded. "Whenever you want to begin, I'm at your service."

"What can you tell me about the Doctor?" Foster asked.

"Dr. Rutherford? A fine man."

"Dr. Starr, I mean."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about Dr. Starr, sir," Max replied. "As you know, I believe, my instructions are that you're to have my full cooperation—but no clues."

"How do I begin then?"

"At the beginning, with the first patient," Max answered. "If you'll follow me ..." he said, entering a long corridor to the left of the iron door.

Foster trailed after him. The corridor was dimly lighted, the illumination coming from bare, low-wattage overhead bulbs. Closed

doors several yards apart lined the way.

“Are all of these rooms occupied?” Foster asked.

“No, sir, not at the moment. But we keep them locked just the same. Security measure. This way, if a patient gets out of his room, he has no place to go. Except, of course, back to his own room—which makes it much easier for me.”

Foster sighted a door that was slightly ajar. He mentioned the fact to Max.

“That’s my office,” Max explained.

“A patient could get in there.”

“That’s right, sir. It proves I haven’t thought of everything.” He did not close the door, however. Instead, he indicated the door at the opposite side of the corridor. “This is our psychotherapy room,” he said, in the manner of a tour guide. He pointed to a dumbwaiter, the opening to which was covered by bars. “We get our food from downstairs on this,” he said.

Foster had the unpleasant feeling of being shown about a prison. “Aren’t the patients free to move around at all?” he asked crossly.

“No, sir.”

“That’s barbaric.”

“Well, it’s not my place to decide things like that, Doctor. I approve, though. It’s for their own good. And they’re not badly off, as you’ll see for yourself.”

FROZEN FEAR

Max halted at a closed door. He got a metal key chain from his jacket pocket, then chose a key and inserted it into the lock.

"The first patient?" Foster asked.

Max, about to turn the key, paused. He nodded. "That's right, Doctor. Her name is Bonnie."

They reached the door and proceeded, moving along the corridor that led to the right.

"A woman—that strikes me as strange," Foster said.

"How so?"

"Well, it didn't even occur to me that Dr. Starr might be a woman until Dr. Rutherford brought up the possibility."

"Yes?"

"Don't you see what I mean? He put forth the idea and now it seems to be working out that way."

It was clear to him that Max was going to tell him only what Dr. Rutherford wanted him to know. Max was typical of his type, a dedicated functionary. "You like your work, don't you?" he said to him.

"Yes, Doctor. I get great satisfaction from it."

"How long have you been an orderly?"

"Oh, years. I'm not sure of the exact number. I could look it up in my record if it's important."

"No."

"Of course, I haven't always been as happy with my work as I am here," Max said. "I've been in some places where the practices were, well, slipshod, let's say."

"Dr. Rutherford and Dr. Starr keep a tight rein on things, though, eh?"

"Dr. Starr did. Dr. Rutherford does now. It's the way I like it. I get my orders, I know exactly what to do, and I do it." He began sorting through the keys on the loop.

"It's a disciplined place, I'll agree with you on that," Foster said. "A lot of problems can be avoided by keeping the patients locked in their rooms. But the question is: are you helping them or hindering them?"

"It's not my job to decide that, Doctor."

"I know. But don't you ever think about it? Don't you ever wonder what the purpose of this institution is? And don't you ask yourself, is it or is it not achieving that purpose?"

"No, sir." He stopped at a door and inserted a key he had selected from the ring. "It's not my duty to ask questions," he said. "I leave that to Dr. Starr—to Dr. Rutherford now." He opened the door. "Besides," he said, "even if I wanted to change things, I don't have the authority. That would lead to frustration. And you know what frustration can do, Doctor."

"What?"

Max grinned. "It can drive a man mad," he answered. "Then, instead of being an orderly with the keys, I'd be a patient, locked in. You wouldn't wish that on me, would you, sir?"

"No ..."

Foster moved past Max, entering the room. There was a bed, with a spread, a chest of drawers, a vanity, the two chairs. There was no mirror above the vanity. He wondered idly if there were a reason for that other than neglect.

Bonnie was seated near the barred window. At first he could see her only in silhouette, for except for the dim light that came through the window the room was dark. Moving a few steps closer he was able to get a better look at her. She was young, slender, fashionably dressed. In profile she had an uncommonly attractive face. But her eyes were dull, staring fixedly at the wall.

Max spoke from behind Foster. "Bonnie ..."

She did not respond.

"Bonnie ..." he said again.

"Go away," she replied flatly. Her lips hardly moved.

"Dr. Foster is here to see you," Max told her.

"Go away," she said again.

Foster turned and spoke to Max. "Let me try it," he said.

Max shrugged and retreated, going back to the door.

"I was hoping I could talk to you," Foster said to Bonnie.

"Leave me alone."

"Just a few words. If I could get an idea of your problem, maybe I could be of some help. You never know. A fresh mind can sometimes see things clearly."

"Talk!" she said bitterly. "That's all you people ever do—talk! You never listen! You never believe!"

"I'll listen, Bonnie," he told her.

“Will you believe?”

“I can’t promise that. My function, as a doctor, is to get at the truth, not simply to accept everything I’m told.”

“Oh, I don’t care whether you believe my story or not,” she said. “I *know* it’s true. I have proof that it’s true. What no one will believe is that I know what I know.”

Foster frowned. “I don’t quite understand.”

“I wasn’t present when a lot of it happened,” she told him. “So, the doctors and the police say, how do you *know* it happened? I just do, that’s how. But they won’t accept that.”

“Well ... put yourself in their place. Would you believe it under those conditions?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I believe that there are ... well, forces ... forces that we can’t understand, not yet.”

“What kind of forces?”

“Occult.”

“Oh ... that ...”

“There—see? You don’t believe me and I haven’t even told you anything.”

Foster thought for a second, then said, “Bonnie, I think of myself as a man with an open mind. I’ll make a bargain with you. Tell me your story, expecting nothing from me. And, in return, I’ll do my best to believe it. I can’t promise that I will, naturally. I would be dishonest with you if I did—before even hearing what you have to say.”

She still had not looked at him. Now she started to. But as her head began to turn, she suddenly changed her mind. Again she fixed her gaze on the wall.

“Well ...?” Foster said. “Is it a bargain?”

“All right.”

Foster waited.

Bonnie remained silent.

“Yes ...?” he said.

“I’m thinking. It isn’t easy to remember it all. As I told you, I wasn’t there when a lot of it happened. I have to ... well, sort of conjure it up ... if you know what I mean ...”

He did not know. But he decided not to ask any more questions at the moment.

“It was an afternoon like this one,” she said finally. “I telephoned Walter to find out if it had arrived. He was a little nervous—

understandably. So ...”

“Now, wait,” Foster said. “Who is Walter?”

“My lover.”

“Oh. And the ‘it’ that had arrived. What was it?”

“The freezer.”

“Fine. I just want to be clear on the details. As I understand it, so far, you called Walter, your lover, to ask if the freezer had arrived. Where were you when you telephoned?”

“At my apartment.”

“You and Walter did not live together?”

“He lived with his wife, Ruth.”

“All right, I think I have it now. Go on.”

“He was worried,” Bonnie said. “I told him there was nothing to be concerned about. The freezer was there and installed, so all we had to do was go ahead with the plan.”

“What was the plan?”

Bonnie ignored the question. “He was afraid something would go wrong,” she continued. “He wanted to see me—before. But I told him that would only delay things. Besides, Ruth was due home. And just then, while we were talking, he heard her car.” She faced away from Foster, turning more toward the window.

“Ruth arrived ...” Foster said, urging her on.

“I wish now we had waited,” Bonnie said, her voice choked. “Maybe we would have changed our minds.”

“But you didn’t.”

“No,” she replied, sighing sorrowfully, “we didn’t.”

“Ruth arrived ...” Foster said again.

Bonnie resumed the story, telling him about an event at which she had not been present. Her description of the occurrences was so clear and vivid, however, that Foster had the feeling that he himself was there to see it happen.

Walter was a strikingly handsome man in his late thirties. He was casually-dressed at the moment in tailored slacks and a madras shirt that was open at the collar. After hanging up the phone, ending the conversation with Bonnie, he crossed the living room to a portable bar, then went to the liquor cabinet behind it. Opening it, he got out a decanter of brandy.

From outside came the sound of a car door being slammed. Walter winced. He heard footfalls on the gravel walk that led from the drive to the entrance. To fortify himself, he poured a drink and downed it in

one gulp, then refilled the glass.

The sound of the front door opening came to him from the direction of the entranceway. He grimaced.

"Walter?" It was his wife, Ruth, calling.

He murmured a response.

Ruth appeared in the archway entrance to the living room. She was Walter's age, trim, wearing a short-sleeved dress and carrying a purse. Ruth had a feline expression and grace. Her attractiveness was spoiled by a manner that was overtly antagonistic.

"You're home early," she said, observing Walter suspiciously.

"Actually, I didn't get into town today," he replied.

"But you *did* get into the brandy, I see."

"This happens to be my first drink," Walter said defensively.

"Not your last, though, I'm sure," she said, going to the sofa.

"Can I fix you one?" Walter asked.

"Please."

Settled on the sofa, Ruth watched her husband speculatively as he got a second glass and poured her a drink.

"How did your class go?" he asked, trying to be congenial.

But the question irked her. "It's not a class," she told him. "You make it sound like creative stitchery. Professor Kalanga is not a pedagogue, he's a spiritual leader."

"Professor!" Walter said scornfully. "Back in Africa, he'd be just another witch doctor—a dime a dozen."

"What do you know about it!" she responded acidly. "Don't forget, I lived there. My father was—"

"—Governor-general of the colony ... I know, I know ..." Walter said wearily. "If the old boy could see his daughter now, he'd turn over in his grave. Good Lord! Taking voodoo lessons from a ... a black charlatan."

"It's not voodoo!" Ruth said sharply. "There are natural forces that are stronger than life or death, forces that modern civilized man has forgotten. The study of those forces happens to be a science—not recognized as such, I admit, but a science nevertheless."

Walter lifted the two brandy glasses from the bar and walked toward the sofa. "It's a good thing it's not recognized, too," he said. "If it were, I'm sure, the universities would be giving degrees in mumbo-jumbo."

"That's right, if you don't understand it, ridicule it."

As Walter handed Ruth one of the glasses and as she reached up to receive it, he saw an amulet around her wrist, a metal chain from

which hung a bone carving of a serpent.

"What's that garbage?" he asked, repelled by it.

"It's called an *ouanga*," she replied coldly, accepting the drink.

"Disgusting."

"It's not intended to be pretty," she told him. "The serpent is a symbol of the life-force."

"So?"

She rattled the amulet. "This is protection," she said.

"Against what?"

"Evil."

"That's pretty broad. Evil what? There's no evil in your life. Why do you waste your time on such rubbish?"

"As a matter of fact, there is evil in my life," she said, looking at him evenly.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Bonnie."

Walter turned away from her for a moment. He placed his drink on the end table beside the sofa, where Ruth had put her purse, then sat down next to her. Forcing a smile, he took her free hand in his.

"That's all over and done with, I swear it," he said.

Ruth's expression softened slightly. She still remained wary, however. "I wish I could believe that, Walter. But you seem to forget—it was only last month that you came to me and asked for a divorce. That's hard for me to overlook ..."

"I haven't seen her since," Walter told her. "You have my word on that." He put an arm around his wife. "Trust me, Ruth ..."

Her eyes became moist. "It's a good thing you haven't seen her," she said. "Because my mind is made up. There won't be any divorce."

"Darling ..."

They put their drinks on the coffee table in front of the sofa, then embraced. Ruth held Walter fiercely, possessively.

"I know you, Walter," Ruth murmured. "You're a weak, vain, selfish opportunist—living off my money. But I forgive you for that," she said intensely. "Because you're so handsome ... and because you're mine ... Walter, I'll never let you go—never!"

Walter kissed her, feigning passion. Ruth purred with animal pleasure.

"You understand that, don't you, darling?" she said, when the kiss ended.

"Understand what?"

“That I’ll never let another woman have you.”

“Perfectly,” he replied.

Ruth cuddled against him. “Darling, why don’t we ...”

Anticipating what she had in mind, Walter interrupted. “Sweetheart, I almost forgot. I have something to show you.”

She glanced up. “What is it?”

Walter slipped out of her embrace, rising. On his feet, he reached down to her. “Come along, you’ll see.”

“Something for me?” Ruth asked, puzzled, allowing him to help her to her feet.

“Just wait. You’ll see.”

Still holding Ruth’s hand, Walter led her from the living room and into the kitchen.

“I don’t see anything,” she protested, looking around.

“Not in here,” he said, proceeding.

“Where?”

“Downstairs?”

“In the basement?” she asked, her bafflement increasing. She giggled girlishly. “What is it—a mousetrap? That’s what we need down there.”

“Don’t guess, just wait.”

He opened the door to the basement, then stepped back to allow his wife to pass. “After you ...”

As Ruth started down the narrow stairway, Walter pressed a light switch, then followed. The basement was lighted by a single bulb that did little but create a lot of dark shadows.

At the bottom of the steps, Ruth halted and peered about at the clutter, piles of old papers and cardboard cartons and boxes. From behind, Walter urged her on.

“Where?” she asked.

Bending slightly at the waist, he pointed toward a far corner. “Over there—see?”

Dimly, she made out what appeared to be a large, waist-high, white chest. “Walter ... whatever ...?”

“Go on ...”

They waded through the clutter, ducking their heads to avoid the maze of overhanging pipes and conduits.

“A freezer!” Ruth cried out in delight, reaching the chest.

“Like it?”

“It’s beautiful,” she told him. She disengaged the latch and raised

the lid. "It's working!" she said, feeling the sudden rush of cold air that rose from the interior.

"Yes, all connected and humming away," Walter replied, stepping back into the dimness.

Ruth bent over and put a hand against the cold inside wall of the chest. "This will be so convenient," she said. "You know how much I've always wanted one. You're a dear to get it for me."

Stooping, Walter reached down into the darkness. His hand found the object he was looking for.

"What a wonderful, wonderful surprise!" Ruth said, closing the lid.

"And I have another for you," Walter told her, emerging from the dimness.

"Another surprise?" she asked, turning. "What is it?"

Walter raised a newly sharpened hatchet. "This!"

Ruth's scream was like the shriek of a tortured animal. Fortunately, it was cut short. A second later she lay in a tangled heap at Walter's feet.

Walter turned his eyes away for a moment, strengthening himself for the ordeal that was to come. Then, determined to go through with it, he kneeled and felt his wife's pulse, making sure that she was dead. Satisfied, he rose, put the hatchet aside, and got the chopping block from behind the freezer where he had placed it earlier.

The job was not as difficult as he had expected it to be. The hatchet was sharp and the various parts of the body came apart rather cleanly. It was distasteful, however. Walter perspired heavily and his hands shook. Toward the end he began hurrying, eager to be finished, and did more hacking than chopping.

Done at last, he got out the paper and began wrapping the parts. It was a messy task. The basement floor was awash with blood and he kept slipping in it. Twice he came close to falling. The idea of wallowing around in his wife's blood, on his hands and knees nauseated him, and he had to pause and take deep breaths to keep from retching. Nevertheless, he continued to pile the brown packages into the freezer.

Her head, crudely wrapped in the brown paper, went into the freezer last. As Walter was about to shut the lid he caught sight of Ruth's amulet, the snake carved from bone, on the floor. He started to give it a kick, but then changed his mind and gingerly picked it up and dropped it in with the packages.

"Rest in pieces," he murmured thickly.

Then down went the lid. The latch clicked closed.

Cleaning up was a chore. Walter climbed the stairs to the kitchen,

got a bucket and filled it with warm water and added soap. From the broom closet he got the long-handled scrub brush, then descended to the basement once more. After sloshing the blood with soapy water he began scrubbing the cement floor, gradually pushing the mixture of blood and water toward the drain. After the initial scrubbing, the stain still remained. He used up three more buckets of water before he got the floor looking like it had prior to the butchering.

After giving the basement one more look to make sure he had not forgotten anything, Walter climbed the stairs again. He cleaned the bucket and scrub brush and put them away, then gave his hands and arms a good washing, even making certain that there was no evidence of the blood under his nails. Confident that he had thought of everything, he went into the living room and telephoned Bonnie.

Bonnie answered the phone: "Yes?"

"It's finished." Walter said proudly.

"Are you all right?" Bonnie anxiously twisted the phone cord.

"Yes, now I am. It was touch and go there for a few minutes—just after. But I handled it all right. I'm fine now." He paused. "How soon can you get here?"

"I'm packing. It won't take me much longer. I should be there within an hour."

"Good—I'll be ready. Come as quickly as you can. I don't want to stay here any longer than necessary."

"Walter ... one thing more ... We'll have to take her along."

Walter was shocked: A wave of nausea threatened him. "Why, for God's sake! I don't see any need for that. By the time anyone investigates we'll be far away."

"Walter, listen ..." she continued patiently. "It will be safer. They may suspect, but it won't do them any good if they have no proof. We have to think about tomorrow, too, not just today."

"We can't carry that chest! It's too heavy. The men who brought it were big, strong, and it was a wrestle even for them."

"Walter, think. We don't have to take the chest. Just the ... the remains ..."

"That's almost as bad. What will we do with them?"

"Get rid of them on the way to the airport ... somehow ..." Bonnie's voice grew steady. "We'll work it out—don't worry."

"But I have them put away. It's so simple—just leave them where they are. What about the neighbors? What if they see us lugging those packages out?"

"Walter, we're just wasting time arguing. I'll drive the car around to the back when I get there. Leave the kitchen door unlocked so I won't

have to knock.”

“All right. But hurry!”

“I love you, darling,” she breathed.

“I love you, too. Now, don’t dawdle. The sooner the better. I’ll be waiting.”

Walter’s hands trembled as he hung up. He went straight to the coffee table and picked up the drink he had left there and downed it. He finished off what was left of his wife’s drink too.

“Are you sure that’s all there was to that telephone conversation?” Foster asked Bonnie.

She flinched, as if the interruption had somehow pained her. “What?” she asked dimly.

“After the murder—the phone call. Are you sure that’s all you and Walter said to each other—what you’ve just told me.”

“Yes, I’m sure. Why?”

“I’m wondering, naturally, how you know exactly how the murder was committed, right down to the last detail. It occurred to me that perhaps Walter told you what he had done during the telephone conversation.”

“I would remember that.”

“You might not. Not if you didn’t want to.”

“Why wouldn’t I want to?”

“The mind has a way of acting independently sometimes, rejecting things it doesn’t want to remember,” Foster answered.

“Well, he didn’t tell me the details. I just *know* what happened.”

“Or perhaps you got the details from him when you arrived at the house,” Foster suggested.

Bonnie withdrew into surly silence.

“I’m only speculating ...” Foster said.

“Doctor ...” Max said from the doorway. “I think you ought to hear the rest of the story before you reach any conclusions.”

Foster looked back over his shoulder at him. “There’s more to it? I thought she was finished.”

Max shook his head.

“Well, then, how does it go from there?” Foster asked, facing Bonnie again.

She remained silent.

“Come now, I *want* to hear,” Foster coaxed.

“Will you stop making up your mind about things before you even know the facts?”

“I apologize.”

That seemed to please her. She glanced sideways at him and appeared to be on the verge of smiling. She did not quite manage it, however. Her expression stayed rigid. After another second, she

focused her attention on the wall again.

“He had another drink after that,” she said. “Then another and another. It was boring—just waiting. And with her downstairs in that freezer chest ...”

“Understandable ...” Foster said, his mind-picture of Walter reforming.

Standing at the bar, pouring himself still another portion of brandy, Walter heard a thump. He frowned, listening. The thump was heard again. It seemed to be coming from the direction of the kitchen. Puzzled, he looked toward the kitchen door. Once more, he heard the thump.

“What the devil ...” he muttered.

The house became quiet again.

Walter shrugged, finished pouring the drink, then lifted the glass to his lips.

Again, the thump. Then a creaking sound.

His hand trembled, spilling brandy from the glass. He heard something, apparently a round object, rolling across a floor. Terrified, he looked toward the kitchen door once more. Before, it had been closed. Now it was open.

Then he saw it. It was round, the size of a head, and it was rolling past the end of the bar. Walter let out a yell and leaped back, splashing brandy on himself. Horrified, he watched the object roll across the living room floor then bump against the coffee table and stop. It seemed to pulse, quivering, as if alive.

“Damn you!” Walter bellowed.

He snatched up the decanter of brandy and hurled it at the object. There was the sound of a crash. Glass, splattered. Walter stared, befuddled, at the spot where the paper-wrapped object had been. It was gone—vanished. The only evidence that it had ever been there was the broken glass of the decanter and a puddle of brandy.

He blinked rapidly, then closed his eyes and shook his head. His nerves had played a trick on him, he was sure. The object had never been there. He had suffered an hallucination. Or the brandy had muddled his mind. Yes, that was probably the explanation. Too much to drink.

There was one way to be certain that he had not truly seen it. All he had to do was go down to the basement and open the freezer chest and look inside. If the paper-wrapped head were still there, then it could not possibly have been in the living room.

Warily, he left the bar and went to the kitchen door, which was still

open. There was no sign of the object in the kitchen. Stooping, he looked closely at the floor. Surely there would be a trail of blood if the object had rolled across ...

His thoughts were interrupted. He heard creaking again. Looking up, he saw that the door to the basement was opening. The door was moving entirely under its own power. Impossible! Yet he could see it. The creaking ceased. The door was now wide open.

Walter straightened. "Who's there?" he called out. His throat was dry with fear, his voice was shallow and strained.

There was no reply.

"Look ... whatever ... whoever ..." Walter began.

He heard the thumping again. It was slow and measured, sounding as if the object were rolling down the basement steps, bump, by bump, by bump, by bump. Terror-stricken, Walter advanced cautiously toward the opening that led to the downstairs.

The thumping stopped.

At the doorway, he peered down into the darkness. He saw no movement. Slowly, he reached out and turned on the light. A soft glow came from down below. Still, though, he could see nothing that he had not seen before—the clutter of boxes and cartons and papers.

"Hello down there?"

As quiet as sleep.

Walter descended a step. He stood listening, his head tilted, and heard a faint humming. It was a new sound to him. The basement had always been deathly quiet before, no humming, no thumping, no rattling, no—. It suddenly occurred to him that the humming was probably the sound of the freezer motor. Relieved, he resumed the descent.

At the bottom of the steps he paused again. The basement floor had dried. As he looked about cautiously he became aware of the humming of the motor again. It seemed louder—much louder—than it had been before. Stooping slightly, he looked toward the freezer, then stared in confusion. Although he could not be positive because of the poor light, it looked as if the lid was open!

The humming became even more pronounced. He felt as if the sound were inside his brain, vibrating. Walter broke out in a cold sweat. His whole body trembled. He wanted to turn and run. But some invisible force seemed to be immobilizing him.

The humming became a shriek, tearing at his mind. He had to silence it. Advancing, desperate to disconnect the freezer and shut off the sound, he saw that what he suspected was true. The lid of the freezer was open! But how could that be? He had closed and locked it!

He was positive of that!

Reaching the freezer, Walter bent forward to peer inside. From inside, a paper-wrapped arm reached up. Horror-stricken, Walter tried to withdraw. But the decision was made too late. Long-nailed fingers closed around his throat. Frantically, he attempted to break the hold. But the grip was like steel. He thrashed wildly. The fingers tightened. Walter struggled for breath, gasping. The arm dragged him down, down, and he sprawled across the open freezer. He felt consciousness slipping away. His last awareness was of the *ouanga*, the bone carving of the snake dangling from the chain around the wrist of the paper-wrapped arm!

“It does make an interesting story,” Foster said tightly. He felt the cold sweat on his body that Walter had felt as he approached the freezer. “I can understand, though, why the police would have difficulty believing it.”

Bonnie stayed silent, staring at the wall.

“I think, in all fairness, you ought to consider the possibility that the police are right—that none of it really happened,” Foster said to her. “Perhaps if we explore the situation—examine it closely—we’ll find a rational explanation for what seems, on the surface, like a ... ah ...” Bonnie, he realized, was not listening.

Max spoke again. “Doctor, you still haven’t heard the whole story,” he said.

“Oh ...” He leaned slightly toward her. “I apologize again. I just assumed ...”

There was no response from her.

Foster waited a moment, then said, “When we first began talking, you spoke about ‘proof’ that this all happened. What did you mean by that?”

Her eyes blinked, then she sighed deeply.

“It would be helpful if you’d tell me ...” Foster urged.

Bonnie nodded, almost imperceptibly, then resumed the telling.

Bonnie parked her car at the rear of the house, as close to the back door as possible. She switched off the lights and the engine, then got out and, looking about to make sure she was not being observed, went to the rear entrance. The door was not locked.

Inside, she called out. “Walter ...”

Waiting for a response, she glanced about the kitchen, noting that the door to the basement was open. Aware that the body was downstairs, she grimaced and moved on, going toward the living

room.

“Walter?” she called out again.

He was not in the living room. She saw the shards of glass and the puddle of liquid near the coffee table and frowned, puzzled. Advancing to the table, she bent down and touched a finger to the liquid, then sniffed it. Brandy. Apparently Walter had dropped a decanter.

As she straightened, Bonnie heard creaking from the direction of the kitchen. Guessing that Walter had been in the basement and had now returned to the main floor, she called out once more and hurried to meet him.

But when she got to the kitchen he was nowhere in sight. Becoming increasingly concerned, Bonnie went to the basement doorway and peered down the steps. She saw the light was on. She heard a rustling sound, a movement of paper.

“Walter!”

Silence.

“Walter! Are you down there?”

Still, no answer.

“If this is a game!”

She became aware of the humming. It was uncommonly loud. But that could explain why Walter didn’t reply. He simply hadn’t heard her calling to him.

Bonnie started down the steps, moving quickly. Then, suddenly wary, she slowed her pace, going down the stairs cautiously, peering ahead into the dimness.

“Walter? Where are you? It’s me!”

No answer.

The humming bothered her. It seemed so aggressive, so penetrating. She hesitated. Perhaps Walter had gone out for some reason. She probably ought to go back upstairs and wait for him there. Then she heard the rustling again.

Damnit, someone was in the basement. And who could it be other than Walter? She took another step. He was somewhere downstairs. Why he didn’t answer her calls, she didn’t know, but ... At the bottom of the steps, she halted.

“Walter!” She was angry, thinking he was teasing her.

Standing at the foot of the stairs, she squinted into the dimness and saw the chopping block and the hatchet. She shuddered and turned her eyes away. Peering past the clutter of papers and boxes, she sighted the freezer. The lid was open. Had Walter been retrieving the

parts of the body so that they could take them along when they left? But where was he now?

She wished the humming would stop. The sound was torturous. There was no need now to keep the freezer operating. If she could disconnect it, the humming would stop.

“Walter?” she called out weakly, moving toward the freezer. “Are you down here?”

There was a loud bang.

Startled, Bonnie leaped back. But then she realized what had caused the sudden sound. The freezer lid had fallen closed. Still somewhat shaken, she advanced again. As she did, she saw the lid slowly rising. Fascinated, she continued forward. The freezer seemed to be beckoning to her.

Reaching it, she looked into it. Walter was inside, his body limp, twisted grotesquely. His face was mottled, patches of blue and purple. She knew without examining him that he was dead. She could see the imprint of fingers at his throat.

“Oh, God! Walter!”

From somewhere behind her came the rustling sound.

Bonnie whipped around.

At her back, the freezer lid slammed closed again.

She screamed.

At the bottom of the steps was a round object, the size of a head, wrapped in dark-brown paper. It seemed to be pulsating, contracting and expanding. Bonnie shrieked again, terrified. The object was blocking her path, keeping her from the stairs.

There was another sound of rustling, coming from a different direction. Bonnie turned toward it and saw faint movement from a dark corner of the basement. Then another paper-wrapped object appeared. It was long and at its base there was a protrusion that looked exactly like a foot. The object was walking!

Screaming, Bonnie backed away. She was being stalked.

“Help!” she shrieked. “Please! Someone! Help!”

Once more there was a rustling sound. She looked around frantically for the source. From another dark corner, a third paper-wrapped object emerged. It was long and slender. Its splayed fingers stretched out toward Bonnie. She turned away, trying to run. But the arm slithered across the floor and the fingers closed around her ankle, holding her fast.

“Help!” Bonnie screamed.

She fell forward and clutched wildly for a weapon. Her hand found

the hatchet. Hysterical, she hacked at the hand that was holding her. It writhed, trying to dodge the blows. But she continued to hack at it and won. The fingers released her ankle and the arm went gliding off into the darkness.

Bonnie scrambled to her feet. But as she started toward the stairs, another paper-wrapped arm appeared, reaching down from among the overhead pipes. She saw the amulet dangling from a chain around the wrist—a carving of a snake. Then she felt the fingers—and the nails tearing into the flesh of her face. She screamed and screamed and screamed, knowing all the while that the effort was pointless.

“They found me lying there the next morning,” Bonnie told Foster, her voice dry, emotionless. “They said I strangled Walter.”

“Why did they think that?”

“I was the only one there.”

“But the parts of the body ...?”

“Gone,” she said. “Everything was gone ... except the freezer ... and Walter ...”

“Where was Ruth, then?” Foster asked.

“She was there. Her hand was on my face. I chopped at it, but—”

“No, what I mean is, where do the police say she was?”

“They don’t. They don’t tell me anything. They only accuse me.”

“Bonnie ... isn’t it possible that there was no Ruth ... no body ...?”

“I knew you wouldn’t believe me.”

“Let’s look at it logically,” Foster said. “A whole human body does not just disappear into thin air, not even after it’s been dismembered. And, too, I’m afraid I have to agree with the police. I can’t understand how you could know that Walter was killed in the way you say he was when you weren’t on hand to witness the killing. How do you explain that? Other than simply saying that you *know* it happened that way?”

“I don’t explain it.”

“Well, then—”

Bonnie groaned. “What a waste of time.”

“Well, you offered me proof. But you just haven’t provided it.”

Bonnie continued to face the wall but her eyes moved to focus on his. Then slowly she turned her head—and he saw the side of her face that until then had been obscured. Deep red scars, hideous gashes, ran from the corner of her mouth to the corner of her eye.

“Now do you believe me?” she asked him, her voice thick with self-pity. “Now? Now?”

Foster lowered his eyes, appalled by the mutilation. “We’ll talk

about it another time,” he replied. He rose. “I’m sure we can make some sense of this if we keep at it ...” He looked at Bonnie again. She had turned away. “I have others to see,” he said, excusing himself.

“Stay out of basements,” she murmured sullenly.

“How did it really happen?” Foster asked Max, when they had left Bonnie’s room and Max was locking the door.

“I can’t tell you. Not yet.”

“Not until I’ve made my choice?”

“That’s right, Doctor.”

“The easy explanation is that there never was a Ruth,” Foster said. “Bonnie probably battled with her boyfriend. Maybe he wanted to break up with her. So, she killed him. That makes sense, doesn’t it?”

“The scars?” Max asked, straightening.

“They fought. He clawed her.”

“But she overcame him—a man—and strangled him and dumped him into the freezer?”

Foster frowned. “I’m not saying that *is* the explanation, I’m saying it’s one possibility. The freezer, though, that puzzles me,” he said. “Symbolically, it has no connection with anything else in the story—that I can determine, at least.”

Max moved on, continuing along the corridor, and Foster joined him.

“I should have asked Bonnie about her past,” Foster said. “Maybe it was *her* father who was a Governor-general-or-whatever in Africa. That would explain how she learned about the *ouanga* ... voodoo ...”

“If you stay with us, you can follow that up,” Max said.

“Yes ...” Foster mused.

THE WEIRD TAILOR

Foster and Max stepped out into the hallway and proceeded down the corridor.

“Who are we seeing next?” Foster asked.

“He calls himself Bruno.”

“Calls himself? In other words, that’s not his real name?”

“That’s for you to decide, Doctor.”

“Bruno ... The initial ‘B’. B Starr. Bruno Starr, perhaps?”

“I can’t say, sir,” Max replied, turning the key. He pushed the door open and stepped back to allow Foster to enter.

The room was small, with a barred window—very much like a cell. It was furnished with a plain wooden table, and matching chairs, a chest, and a narrow cot. Foster felt pity for anyone who had to live in it for any length of time.

“Bruno ...” Max said, indicating the aging, sad-faced little man who was seated on the cot.

Foster moved toward him. Bruno gave no sign of being aware that he was not still alone. He was sewing, tailoring a length of white cloth into a shapeless garment. His attention remained fixed on the movement of the needle.

“You have a visitor,” Max said to Bruno. “This is Dr. Foster.”

He responded with a slight nod, never taking his eyes off his work.

“You sew well,” Foster said. “Did you learn it as a surgeon?”

“No.”

“What are you making?” Foster asked.

“Whatever you like,” Bruno replied, continuing the sewing.

“Let’s see ... a surgical gown?”

“If that’s what you wish,” Bruno answered. “I can make whatever you need. A surgical gown ...” He glanced up. “... or a shroud,” he told Foster. “I’m a tailor,” he said, returning his attention to his work.

“Are you sure? Doctors sew. They stitch.”

“I’ve always been a tailor. I can’t remember ever wanting to be a doctor. I made a suit for a doctor once. But I didn’t become a doctor because of it. No, I’ve always been a tailor ... always ...”

Foster got a chair and placed it beside the cot and sat down.

“Tailoring seems like interesting work,” he said. “I confess I don’t know much about it, though. It takes a certain talent, does it not?”

“Skill,” Bruno replied.

“I’d like to know about your life as a tailor,” Foster said. “Would you tell me?”

Bruno stopped sewing. He looked into Foster’s eyes, and apparently was encouraged by what he saw. “You honestly do want to know about me,” he said, amazed.

“Yes, I do. All about you—your life as a tailor.”

Bruno’s expression seemed to cloud over, as if his eyes were now focusing on the distance, beyond Foster, far into the past. “I’ll tell you,” he said dimly. “Maybe you’ll understand ...”

As Bruno talked, Foster’s compassion for the man enabled him to relive his memories along with him, just as a short time earlier he had shared the suffering of the young man in the engravings. Bruno’s descriptions became images in Foster’s mind, and he too saw what the tailor, remembering, was seeing.

In trousers and undershirt, the sweat pouring from his body, Bruno stood at the pressing table at the back of his shop. He lowered the press on a pair of trousers and great clouds of steam rushed from the machine, billowing about Bruno and nearly obscuring him.

There was a tinkling sound from the bell at the door of the shop.

Bruno raised the press and took the trousers from the table and folded them carefully and put them aside, then moved toward the front of the shop. He found Mr. Stebbins waiting for him at the small, scarred wooden counter. Stebbins was a thin, sallow, shabby-looking man, with dark, vulture-like eyes.

“Mr. Stebbins ... good evening ...” Bruno said drearily.

“It’s the first of the month,” Stebbins told him, getting a worn, leatherbound notebook from his pocket.

“The first of the month,” Bruno mused. “So soon? What happened to last month? It was here, now it’s gone.”

“The rent is due.”

“Yes. That happens every first-of-the-month. It’s the one thing in life I can depend on. I suppose it should be a comfort to me. But somehow ...”

“Have you got it?” Stebbins broke in.

Bruno forced a smile. “Mr. Stebbins, I have a wonderful idea. I was thinking ...”

“Have you got it—the rent?” Stebbins said, interrupting again.

But Bruno insisted on telling him about his wonderful idea. "Every month you come here," he said, "and always you wear the same suit. Mr. Stebbins, isn't that something to think about?" Somewhat self-consciously, Stebbins looked down at himself. "There's nothing wrong with my suit," he replied defensively. "It gives me good wear."

"Wear, yes. Style, no," Bruno said. He gestured toward the full-length mirror. "Look at yourself. Ask yourself the question: do you look your best?"

Stebbins peered narrowly at his own image.

"A man like you, you need a suit with up-to-date style," Bruno told him. "For one month's rent, Mr. Stebbins, I could make you a suit like that—up-to-date."

Stebbins glowered at his reflection.

"Custom tailoring," Bruno said, moving from behind the counter. He went to the window dummy that was standing against the wall just inside the doorway. The dummy had seen better days. It had painted black hair, a curled mustache, staring blue eyes and a fixed smile, marred by missing chips of paint. It was stiffly and awkwardly posed and dressed in an ill-fitting tweed suit. All in all, the dummy had the look of an unburied, decaying corpse.

"All hand-stitched, just like this," Bruno said touching the tweed suit, "the way I learned in the old country. And the price—so low. Just one month's rent."

Stebbins shook his head.

"Any cloth you choose," Bruno said. "Look around, maybe I have something you like. Or, if I don't, I'll get what you want."

"Not interested," Stebbins told him.

Desperately, Bruno fingered the lapel of the tweed suit. "Here, come here, look at this detailing. The stitching, the workmanship. So fine, so expert ..."

Stebbins made a sound of disgust. "I don't need a new suit," he said. "This suit I have is good enough. And even if I did need a new suit, I wouldn't get it from you. What kind of tailor are you? A tailor who has no customers! That's a poor way to run a business!"

Bruno sagged, defeated.

"Now—my rent," Stebbins said.

"I haven't got it," Bruno said wearily, moving back behind the counter.

"Now, see here ..."

"*You* see," Bruno said, gesturing, taking in the sorry-looking surroundings. "This shop ... people used to come here for fine tailoring. But now ... a little mending, a little pressing ... that's all I

get. People want flash these days, not quality." He sighed deeply. "I'll pay the rent. But you must give me a little time."

"How much time?"

"Another month?"

Stebbins shook his head. "Out of the question. I have obligations to meet, too, you know. I don't ask for time. I neither ask for it nor give it. That's the way I do business."

"Two weeks, then?" Bruno pleaded. "Give me that much time, at least."

Again, Stebbins shook his head.

"A week," Bruno begged. "Only a week ... please ..."

"Tell you what," Stebbins said grudgingly. "Today is Monday. I'll come back on Saturday. Saturday morning."

"That's not even a full week."

"Bright and early Saturday morning," Stebbins said. "If you don't have the rent for me by then, you can start packing. I'm an easy man to get along with, but business is business."

Bruno sighed again. "I'll try ..."

"Bright and early," Stebbins said, putting his notebook away and moving toward the exit.

"Yes ... bright and early ..."

The bell tinkled as Stebbins opened the shop door. "Or out you go." The door closed behind him.

"Out I go," Bruno murmured sorrowfully, trudging back toward the rear of the shop. "It's so easy for him—a few words: 'Out you go'—but so difficult for me. Go where? Where is 'out?' Into the street? At my age? A man with a wife? What do we do? Sit on the curb and wait to be taken away with the garbage?"

He picked up the trousers he had pressed and put them on a hanger and hung them on a rod with other pairs of trousers. "I could sell my sewing machine," he said, addressing himself again. "That would pay this month's rent. But without my machine how would I make the money to pay the next month's rent? There is no answer." Looking toward the front of the shop, he spoke to the window dummy. "Help me," he said. "All these years, I've given you a home. I've asked nothing of you, only to stand there. Now it's time for you to do something for me. Get the money for me. I don't care how. I'm past that now, past caring."

The dummy, not surprisingly, did not respond.

Bruno motioned hopelessly. "I should know better than to ask," he said. "When a man is down, he has no friends."

“Dear ...”

The voice came from behind him. It was his wife’s voice. Turning, he saw that she was standing in the curtained doorway that led to their living quarters. Bruno felt tears forming in his eyes as he looked at her. Anna had once been an attractive woman. Now, like him, she was fading.

“I thought I heard you talking to someone,” she said.

“To him,” Bruno told her, indicating the window dummy. “But he won’t answer me. That’s gratitude, isn’t it? After all I’ve done for him. Kept him clothed and sheltered all these years. And now he has nothing to say to me.”

Anna smiled warmly. “Dinner is ready,” she said.

“I’m not hungry.”

The smile disappeared. “Something is wrong?” she said, concerned.

“Not something, Anna. Everything. Mr. Stebbins was here. He gave me a week to pay the rent—not even a full week, only until Saturday ... bright and early.”

Anna shook her head in dismay. “I don’t know where ... I thought he would wait a while longer. We’ve always paid. Not always on time, but we’ve always paid.”

“A man works all his life and in one week ... one week ... I don’t know ... where can we go? This isn’t just my shop, it’s also our home. He knows that. How can a man ...?”

The bell over the entrance door tinkled.

Bruno and Anna peered through the dimness of the shop toward the doorway. A tall, distinguished-looking man had entered. As he approached the counter they saw that he was well-dressed and carrying a black satchel.

“Yes, sir?” Bruno said, going to meet the man.

“Good evening. Is the proprietor in?” The man’s manner was cultured, his voice clear and firm.

“I ... I am the proprietor,” Bruno replied. Noting that the man was looking past him, he glanced back and saw that Anna had followed him to the counter. “My wife, Anna,” he said.

The man acknowledged the introduction with a quick nod. “My name is Smith,” he told Bruno.

“Yes, Mr. Smith ...”

Again, the man looked past him at Anna, meaningfully this time. Bruno realized that Smith preferred not to speak in front of her.

“Anna, go have your supper,” Bruno said to his wife. “I will eat later ... perhaps ...”

She hesitated.

“Anna!”

Obediently, she turned away, moved to the rear of the shop, then disappeared from sight through the curtains.

“Now,” Bruno said. “What can I do for you, Mr. Smith?”

“Am I correct in assuming that you can custom-tailor a garment from material of my own selection? I was told that you could.”

“You want me to make you a suit?” Bruno replied, beaming.

“Exactly.”

Nervously, Bruno motioned toward a pile of bolts of shabby cloth at the end of the counter. “I have some fine woolens here. Perhaps ...”

“No, that won’t be necessary,” Smith said. “I brought my own material.”

“Oh. Well, yes, whatever you prefer.”

Smith placed the black satchel on the countertop. As he did, Bruno saw the large ring with the huge, glittering stone on a finger of his right hand. He stared in awe at the diamond. Clearly, Mr. Smith was a man of considerable wealth.

“You have something special in mind, then,” Bruno said, as Smith opened the bag.

“That is correct. Something very special ... for a very special purpose.”

Bruno watched, fascinated, as Smith extracted a bolt of cloth from the satchel. The material, like the diamond, seemed to glisten and sparkle. His eyes opened wide as Smith unrolled a few yards of cloth on the counter. It was a dark gray, flecked with bits of different colored metallic thread that gave off flickering reflections of light.

“Unusual ... very unusual ...” Bruno said softly.

“Special.”

“Yes, special ... and very unusual.”

Cautiously, Bruno touched his fingers to the material. There was a faint crackling and quickly he withdrew his hand.

“Static electricity,” Smith explained, smiling. “The air is quite dry in here.”

“Pardon?”

“The dry air—the electricity—that’s what caused the crackling.”

“I have lots of cloth of my own, but none of it makes noises,” Bruno said.

“Well, I believe we’ve already established that this is not just ordinary cloth. It’s ...”

“... very special.”

“Correct.”

“A material like this will not be easy to work with,” Bruno said, glancing again at the diamond ring, wondering how much he should charge the man for making the suit. “But I guarantee my work. It’s the best. I learned my trade in the old country, you know. Of course, I am not as young as I used to be. But I have lost none of my skill. I take my time and I do my work well.”

“Yes, I understand that. It’s what I want—the best.”

“And you shall have it. Now, if you will slip out of your jacket so I can take your measurements. It won’t—”

Smith raised a hand, interrupting. “The suit is not for me,” he said.

“Not for you?”

“It’s for my son.”

“Ah!” Bruno said, nodding, thinking that he understood. “And when will he come for a fitting? The fitting is most important. In the old country we had a saying: as the fitting goes, so goes the garment.”

“He won’t be coming in,” Smith replied. “It’s to be a surprise.”

“A suit without a fitting?” Bruno shook his head. “It would be a surprise, all right. It would be a surprise if he could wear it. How can I make a suit without a fitting?”

Smith got a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and opened it and placed it on the counter. Bruno saw that it was almost entirely covered with instructions in a fine, spidery handwriting.

“I have written down all the measurements,” Smith said. He turned the sheet of paper over. On the other side was a drawing. “And here is a diagram of the style.”

Bruno nodded, squinting at the sketch.

“The suit must be made exactly in accordance with these instructions,” Smith continued. “The buttons must be bone, turned and bored by hand. Nothing must be done by machine. Nothing. Is that clear? That point is very important. Nothing by machine, all by hand.”

“Such tailoring is very expensive,” Bruno warned.

“Then you’ll charge me accordingly, I assume,” Smith replied, smiling.

“Of course. Business is business they tell me. I must make a living.”

“The price?”

Bruno frowned thoughtfully, wondering if he could charge as much as a hundred pounds.

“Two hundred pounds shall we say?” Smith suggested.

Bruno's mouth dropped open. "Two hundred?" He frowned again, struggling to recover from the surprise. "Yes, that is about what I had in mind," he said. "I can make the suit for that figure and still have a little left over for profit for myself."

"You will not stint."

"Oh, no, no. The best workmanship." He began rerolling the bolt of cloth. "I will start immediately," he said.

"No." Smith picked up the sheet of paper from the counter and pointed to the instructions. "This is the schedule," he said. "It must be followed exactly."

"Schedule?" Bruno said, puzzled, taking the instructions from him. As he read, an expression of bewilderment spread gradually across his face. "But these times ... they are all after midnight ..." he said. "I don't understand."

"I am not paying you to understand, I am paying you to make a suit according to my directions."

"Yes, of course." Bruno drew back a step, suddenly wary.

Once more, Smith smiled. "Let's say that I happen to believe in astrology," he said. "There, is that explanation enough?"

"The stars? You want me to make a suit by the stars?"

"Obviously, you're not a believer," Smith said, his manner becoming somewhat abrupt. "But, no matter. The only thing that concerns you is following my instructions to the letter." He leaned forward slightly to emphasize the importance of what he was about to say. "There must be no mistake. Is that absolutely clear? It's essential that you do exactly as I wish. No mistakes."

"Everything will be according to the instructions—I swear it," Bruno told him.

"Very well." Smith closed the satchel and lifted it from the counter. "You'll find my address there," he said, indicating the sheet of instructions. "When may I expect delivery?"

"Mmmmm ... this is Monday," Bruno replied, calculating. "If I begin tonight ... yes, so ... and then tomorrow night and ..." He came to a decision. "I can bring the suit to you on Friday evening," he informed Smith.

"Good. No later. The minute it's finished, bring it to me."

Smith walked to the exit, then, opening the door, looked back. "Remember my instructions!"

Bruno nodded. "And no mistakes. I understand."

The bell tinkled again as Smith departed.

"The rich—always the crazy ones," Bruno said to himself. "Make a

suit by the stars! A present for his son! A surprise!” He broke into a wide grin. “Two hundred pounds. I can pay the rent on the shop. What do I care if the man is crazy!”

Bruno heard footfalls behind him. Turning, he saw Anna approaching. Evidently she had heard the tinkle of the bell.

“At last, something good has happened,” Bruno told his wife. “A suit to make!”

Anna did not seem pleased. “Bruno, who was that man?” she asked worriedly.

“Who was he? A customer. He ordered a suit. He’ll pay me two hundred pounds.”

“What was his name?”

“Smith. What’s wrong with that? Why aren’t you happy?”

“What is this?” she asked anxiously, picking up the sheet of paper.

“Instructions. The suit is for his son—a present, a surprise.”

Anna read, looking increasingly dismayed. “Bruno, I don’t like this,” she said. “I’m afraid. There’s something not right about it. It will make trouble for you?”

He stared at her baffledly. “How do you know a thing like that? Are you a stargazer, too?”

“A what?”

“The customer—Smith. He wants me to make the suit by the stars. But why not? Two hundred pounds, Anna. We can pay the rent. We can keep our home—for a while, at least.”

“Bruno, I would rather be on the street than have trouble.”

“Anna, listen to me. We cannot pay the rent. Is that not trouble? What trouble could be worse than that?” He gestured toward the living quarters. “Heat my dinner, Anna. I must work tonight.”

The man who called himself Bruno paused in his story to rethread his needle. Foster became aware of the tightness in his throat, the result of his identification with the troubles of Bruno, the tailor.

“Are you ready to go on to the next patient, Doctor?” Max asked.

“Go on? Why would I want to do that?”

“I’m sorry—I thought by now you would be convinced that this man is not Dr. Starr.”

“Are you telling me that he isn’t?” Foster asked.

“No. I can’t tell you anything, you know that. I just got the impression that you believed his story. You seemed to be so deeply involved in it. And, if you believe it, then you believe he’s a tailor. He can’t be both a tailor and Dr. Starr, can he?”

“I’ll stay and hear the end of the story,” Foster replied. “It’s too soon to make a judgement.”

Max shrugged. “Whatever you decide.”

Foster turned his attention to Bruno again. “This Smith ...” he said. “That sounds like a fictitious name to me.”

“He said his name was Smith. Who was I, a poor tailor, to say it wasn’t so?”

“What I mean is, isn’t it possible that Smith is simply a creation of your imagination?”

Bruno resumed the sewing. “If you say so, I’m sure you’re right, Doctor. What does a poor tailor know of things like that.”

Foster sighed. “All right, you’re a tailor,” he said. “Now, you had a suit to make. A suit for this man Smith.”

“To be made according to his instructions and from a special cloth.”

“Yes. What happened next?”

Seated at his worktable, sewing in the strong, concentrated light from a gooseneck lamp, Bruno raised his head and looked at the clock he had brought into the shop from his and Anna’s living quarters. The time was five o’clock. Diligently, he continued the meticulous stitching. But a second later the needle pricked his finger and a single drop of blood fell to the shimmering cloth.

“Ow!” Bruno cried out. For a moment the pain had been intense.

Bruno looked resentfully at the clock. It was now one minute after

five. He took in a deep breath, then released it wearily. Once more he inserted the point of the needle into the cloth and again it found his flesh instead.

“Aiiiii!” he wailed.

The curtains to the living quarters parted and Anna, sleepy-eyed, appeared. “Bruno! What is it?” she asked. She looked at the clock. “Do you know what time it is!”

“I know very well what time it is,” he replied, nursing his finger. “The instructions said to work only until five o’clock. I tried to sew a little longer and ...” He held up his finger. “How long since I last stuck myself like this?” he said. “Not since I was an apprentice in the old country.”

Anna looked apprehensively at the drop of blood on the cloth. “There is something wrong ... something strange ...” she murmured.

“Don’t be foolish,” Bruno said crossly. “It’s the hour. I’m tired. That’s why I stuck myself.” He wiped the blood from the material, then put it aside and rose. Stretching, he looked toward the front of the shop, where, through the window, he could see reflections of the first rays of the morning sun. “Some sleep, that’s all I need,” he said, exhausted. “Then I’ll have command of the needle again.”

He did regain control over the needle. But because he followed Smith’s instructions to the letter after that, not because he got more sleep. In fact, he found it almost impossible to rest. When he went to bed each morning after working on the suit from midnight until five, he was tormented by dreams that kept him half-awake.

The dreams—nightmares—were dominated by visions of the strange, shimmering cloth. It seemed to be alive, attempting to possess Bruno, to smother him. Like some giant, sparkling organism, it came creeping out of his subconscious, gradually enveloping him until he could no longer breathe. Frantic, he would flail at it and awaken himself, only to find that he was fighting an imaginary foe. And not long after he had dropped off to sleep again, the cloth in the form of a creature would materialize once more, threatening him, forcing him to awaken and do battle.

Desperate for the money he would be paid for the job, however, Bruno kept doggedly to the task. And on the fourth night he finished. He was too mind-and body-weary for celebration, though. Having completed the final stitch, he simply sat, his shoulders drooping, his eyes heavy-lidded. The victory over the strange cloth was not at all sweet, as he had expected it to be. Somehow, he had lost the capacity for exultation.

Anna, who had begun staying awake while her husband was working, came into the shop. She halted and looked at Bruno sadly.

Then, realizing that his fingers and needle were still, she brightened a bit.

“It is finished?” she said hopefully.

“I am the one who is finished,” he replied drearily. “Four nights ... nothing but work from midnight until dawn ... little sleep ... But, yes, it’s finished, it’s done ...”

“May I see it?”

With difficulty, Bruno rose. As he did, he saw his reflection in the full-length mirror. He was hollow-eyed. He had a gray stubble of beard and his face was thin and drawn. He hardly recognized the stooped, emaciated figure in the glass.

“Bruno ...” Anna said softly.

“Yes ...?”

He got a hanger, then arranged the suit on it for his wife to inspect. She stared in disbelief. It was not like any suit she had seen before. The jacket was oddly cut, with no lapels, no pockets and a high collar. The bone buttons were tiny, the trousers cuffless. As before, though, it was the cloth that fascinated her most. The metallic flecks seemed to be moving, crawling about the surface, changing colors, giving off flickers of light.

“Well, what do you think?” Bruno asked.

“It’s ... strange ... the material ... the way it shimmers ... it seems almost alive ...”

Bruno winced.

“Maybe when you press it ...” Anna said.

“Mr. Smith does not want the suit pressed. It’s in his instructions. Do not press it.”

“What do you do now?” she asked.

“I deliver it,” he replied. “Now. Just as it is. Tonight.”

“Tonight?” she said doubtfully. “At this hour? He will be asleep.”

“Then I’ll wake him. That is what he wants—to have it delivered the minute it’s finished. So ... so, I’ll deliver it. Truthfully, I’ll be happy to be rid of it,” he told his wife, getting a box for the suit. “And I’ll be happier still to get the two hundred pounds.”

“I hope nothing goes wrong.”

“What could go wrong now?” he said, placing the suit in the box. “It is finished—exactly according to the instructions—and I am delivering it. That is what the customer wanted and that is what he is getting.”

“I have a feeling ...”

“Forget it,” Bruno told her crossly. “The job is done, all except the collecting. I don’t want to hear any more about it.”

Wearing a jacket to protect himself from the night chill and carrying the suit box, Bruno left the shop. There was a heavy mist in the air, diffusing the glow from the street lamps, reducing visibility. He appeared to be the only pedestrian on the street.

After a walk of several blocks, Bruno located a cab. He read Smith's address from the sheet of paper to the driver, then settled back for the ride. It was a slow drive because of the mist. Bruno could not see where he was being taken, and when the cab finally arrived at the destination he did not know exactly where in the city he was. The matter did not concern him, however. His mind was on the money he was soon to receive.

Left alone on the street after paying the cab driver, Bruno peered about. He was surprised by the shabbiness of the surroundings. The area was dark, deserted, decaying. Squinting through the dimness at the numbers above the dark doorway to a ramshackle tenement building, he saw that, in spite of his doubts, he had been delivered to the address that Smith had given him. He shook his head in bewilderment, wondering why a man of Smith's obvious wealth would choose to live in such a rundown neighborhood.

But that was none of his concern. He climbed the steps to the doorway and pressed the button. From inside came the sound of a buzzer. Impatient, shifting nervously, he waited. There was no response. He started to press the button again. But as he touched it with his finger he heard the latch click. The door opened slowly. In the opening stood Mr. Smith, carrying a tall candle in an ornate gold holder. He was dressed as he had been when he visited Bruno's tailor shop. His large diamond ring sparkled in the candlelight.

"Ah! Here at last!" Smith said, delighted. He indicated the suit box. "Is that it?"

"Yes, sir," Bruno replied. "I promised it on Friday, and here it is."

"Good! Come in, come in ..."

Bruno entered. As Smith closed the door behind him, he looked around. He was in a dark, high-ceilinged hallway. It appeared to be completely bare. In the light of the candle he could see cobwebs clinging to the walls and ceiling. Smith was evidently as eccentric as he was rich.

"This way. We'll go to my study," Smith said, leading Bruno along the corridor.

Bruno was careful to stay close to him. The narrowness of the hallway gave him the feeling of being trapped. He understood now why it was bare. There was simply no room for any furnishings. The house, clearly, had been built to suit the advantage of the builder, not the inhabitant.

Smith took him to a fair-sized room. It was not much of an improvement over the hallway, however. Except for a heavy table and a matching wooden chair it was equally devoid of furnishings. The windows were hung with faded drapes and one wall was lined with bookshelves—but they were bare and thick with cobwebs.

As Smith put the candleholder down, Bruno saw a large, vellum-bound book on the table. It was open and its pages were yellowed, the printing faded. He felt a shiver pass through his body. He did not know why but the book made him feel uneasy.

“The suit is completed, you say?” Smith said eagerly.

Bruno nodded. “It was very difficult, though—working with such material—and the hours, only at night ...”

“But you *did* follow the instructions?”

“Oh, yes, sir. It’s just as you ordered. A promise is a promise. I told you I’d do it the way you wanted and I did. I’m not a man who makes a promise lightly.”

“Splendid!” Smith said, excited. “You have no idea how much this means to me—and to my son.”

“Yes, your son ...” Bruno said “Where is he?”

Smith gestured vaguely. “He’s here. But that doesn’t matter.” He looked covetously at the suit box. “If you’ll just show me your work now ...”

“But there has to be a fitting to make sure it’s right,” Bruno said. “Measurements are fine, as far as they go. But the figure is a funny thing. No suit can be perfect until there’s been a fitting, then a little tucking-in ... here, there ...”

“If you obeyed my instructions, the fit will be perfect as it is,” Smith told him. “Now, no more talk, please. Show me the suit.”

“Well,” Bruno said uncomfortably, “there’s more to it than that.”

Smith peered at him perplexedly.

“What I mean is, I kept my promise. I made the suit—despite the difficulties—and now I’ve delivered it,” Bruno said. “But there are two sides to every bargain, if you know what I mean.”

“No.”

Bruno cleared his throat. “There’s the money,” he said.

Finally understanding, Smith broke into a smile. “Oh, yes, of course, of course.” He chuckled. “Your fee. Don’t worry, I haven’t forgotten that. You just send the bill along and the minute I get it, or in due course, I’ll take care of it.” He reached for the box.

Bruno stepped back. “That’s very kind of you, sir, very considerate,” he said. “But the fact is, I have a circumstance. It’s a matter of my

rent. My landlord ... Well, I won't trouble you with the details. But what I'm getting at is—I need the money now.”

Smith continued to smile, but there was an edge to his tone when he spoke. “I’m afraid that’s out of the question,” he informed Bruno. “It’s not customary to pay tradesmen on delivery—need I remind you of that? But never fear. Just mail your bill in the regular fashion, and you’ll get your money.” Again, he reached toward the suit box.

And, as before, Bruno retreated. “Mr. Smith,” he said, “your cloth was special—your word for it—and I understood that and accepted it. Now, please, try to understand that my situation regarding the money is special. I must have my fee before I can give you the suit. I realize that it’s difficult for you to see my side of it. You’re rich, money is no problem to you. But ... well, I must insist ...”

Smith’s smile was replaced by an expression of bitterness. “On the contrary, I *do* understand your situation, only too well,” he told Bruno. “It so happens that at the moment I am in the same fix.”

“You?” Bruno said dubiously.

“Yes, me,” Smith replied. “But don’t worry. It’s temporary. I’ll be in funds again in a very short while. Just as soon as my son returns. In the meantime, though, I have nothing, nothing at all! So, you see,” he said, trying to be amiable again, “you’ll just have to wait. You really have no choice in the matter.”

Bruno stared at him dumbly, finding it extremely difficult to believe that the man could not pay him. His attention was drawn to Smith’s diamond ring as it glittered in the candlelight. Surely it was worth a great deal of money.

“Your ring ...” he said. His voice was thin and taut.

Smith glanced down at the diamond. “This?” He smiled wanly, then removed the ring and tossed it onto the table. “You can have it if you want it,” he said. “It’s a fake, worth less than nothing. A bauble, a toy.”

“It sparkles so,” Bruno protested.

“Glass ... colored glass,” Smith told him. “Oh, the ring held a real diamond once.” He sighed sorrowfully. “So long ago,” he said. “I had to dispose of it. I needed funds to continue my work.”

Bruno looked about. “Work ...?”

“My studies ... my research,” Smith told him. He pointed to the book that was open on the table. “This volume here ... it’s part of my work. It’s very old, very rare. The only one of its kind left in the world, as a matter of fact. A book of that kind does not come cheap, sir. It cost me my fortune.”

“You spent all of your money for a book?” Bruno said incredulously.

Smith nodded. "Every penny." He gestured broadly. "This house was filled with treasures. Paintings, jewelry, antiques. I sold it all to buy this book. I had to, because of my son!"

"You're lying!" Bruno said angrily.

"Can't you see for yourself?" Smith responded. "Look around you. It's all gone. There's nothing left. Nothing!"

Still doubting the man, Bruno looked past him, searching for some clue to the whereabouts of the riches he had described. He saw a closed door that apparently led to another part of the house.

"What's in there?" he demanded, pointing.

"Nothing!" Smith replied hastily. He moved toward the closed door as if to protect it.

Bruno advanced. "Is that where you're hiding your treasures?" He hurried, getting between Smith and the door.

"Believe me, there's nothing in there!" Smith cried out in panic. He grabbed for Bruno, intending to hold him back. "I swear! It's only an empty room!" he shrieked, as Bruno eluded his grasp.

Bruno reached the door and closed his hand around the knob.

"Don't!" Smith pleaded.

Bruno turned the knob and thrust the door open. To escape Smith, he dashed into the room, then abruptly halted, stunned. In the center of what had evidently once been a bedroom stood an open coffin. Standing sentry duty, one at each corner, were four tall candelabra. The setting was eerie, other-worldly. The flames of the candles flickered, wafted by a breeze that Bruno could not feel. The polished dark wood and gold of the coffin gleamed in the candlelight. It had the appearance of a shrine.

Smith's voice, no more than a whisper, came from behind Bruno. "Please leave, I beg you."

Ignoring the plea, Bruno moved slowly forward. His shadow, becoming monstrous as he neared the candelabra, seemed to be crawling upward along a wall, as if, wiser than he, it were trying to escape. He sensed that Smith was only a step behind him.

Then, a few paces from the coffin, he saw its contents. The corpse of a young man, naked to the waist, the rest of his body concealed by the casket's lower section, rested on the silken bed. The young man's eyes were closed, his hands folded on his chest. The face was waxen and pallid. There were greenish-blue patches and blotches of decay at the cheeks and lips. Transfixed, Bruno stared in horror.

"You can't understand," he heard Smith murmur.

Bruno shuddered.

"This is for him," Smith said. "It isn't what it looks like to you.

That's why I tried to keep you out."

"I understand, all right," Bruno said hoarsely. "You're a murderer!"

"No, no!" Smith responded, sounding suddenly angry. "I told you you couldn't understand. I'm no murderer. He died a natural death three weeks ago."

Bruno half-turned and peered at Smith, baffled. "Three weeks ago? And you keep him here? Are you mad?"

"He's my son!" Smith answered, as if that were a rational explanation. "My only child, the only flesh of my flesh."

"But ..."

"He's the one I've been working for," Smith said. "The book told me what to do. The suit—the book told me. That's why I had you make it. It's for him."

"Oh, my God! You are mad!" Bruno said. "A suit for a dead son!"

"It's his!" Smith shouted, suddenly reaching for the box again.

Once more, Bruno kept it from his grasp. "Mad or not you'll not have this suit until I get my money!" he told Smith fiercely. "Damn your book! What does it tell you about paying your debts! I worked hard! I worked nights, following your insane instructions! I demand my money!"

Smith's expression became maniacal. His eyes glinted with rage. Moving toward Bruno, he slipped a hand into his jacket pocket and produced a small revolver. The blue steel of the weapon gleamed in the candlelight.

"You can't stop me now!" Smith said wildly. "No one can stop me! My son will have his suit! Give it to me!"

Terrified, Bruno stared into the muzzle of the revolver. His mind would not function, would not tell him what to do. Finally, fear-stricken, having no other solution, he hurled the suit box straight at Smith's face.

Caught by surprise, Smith staggered backwards, waving his arms awkwardly, trying to escape the obstacle. Bruno followed his counterattack with a forward lunge that sent him crashing into his adversary and kept him off-balance. Desperate, Bruno grasped for the arm that held the gun. He and Smith fell to the floor together, the box between them.

As Bruno and Smith wrestled ineptly, the suit box slipped away. Bruno's hands closed tightly around Smith's wrist. Strengthened by panic, he forced the arm down. For an instant, he found himself facing the muzzle of the gun once more. Then, with a convulsive effort, he turned Smith's arm inward. There was the muffled sound of a shot. A burst of smoke rose from the area of Smith's chest. Smith gasped,

sighed deeply, then went limp.

Shocked—realizing what had happened—Bruno scrambled to his feet. Backing away from Smith's body, his foot struck the suit box. He scooped it up and fled from the room, entering the study. His eyes fell on the book that Smith claimed had cost him his fortune. Impulsively, Bruno went to the table, snapped the book closed, then put it under his arm along with the suit box. He bolted from the room, raced along the hallway, then, moments later, escaped from the house and went running off into the darkness.

Unable to run any further, Bruno halted and wrapped an arm around a lamppost and hung on, still clutching the book and the box in the other arm. He gasped for breath. His chest ached as he struggled to fill his lungs with air. He wanted desperately to sit down, to rest his legs, but fear kept him on his feet, an illogical fear of the man he had left dead in the house blocks away.

Eventually, Bruno was able to breathe normally again. The pain in his chest subsided, then disappeared. Still, though, he remained clinging to the lamppost. He did not know where he was. With the mist still heavy in the air, he could not even decide which way to go to get out of the area. Every way was dark and threatening.

He heard footfalls, distant but drawing nearer. His pulse quickened and he felt fear clutching at his heart again. The footfalls were heavy, lumbering. They were almost upon him. He clutched the box and the book more tightly, protecting them, from what he did not know. A figure loomed up out of the mist. Bruno gasped in fright.

"You all right, sir?" It was a man's voice, amiable, concerned. Bruno saw his face, plump and friendly. Apparently the man was simply a passerby.

"I ... I seem to be lost," Bruno told him.

"No wonder—thick as it is," the man said. "Where're you looking for, sir?"

"Ah ... my shop. That is, I mean, a cab."

"No problem that," the man told him. He pointed in the direction from which he had come. "Back there a block," he said. "There's a stand. And a cab, too. At least, there was a minute ago."

"Thank you, thank you."

"No trouble. 'Night, sir," the man said, moving on.

"Good night."

Tucking the box and book tightly under his arm, Bruno set out in the direction the man had indicated. When he reached the corner he found a cab stand, and, blessedly, a cab. Getting into the rear seat, he gave the driver the address of his shop. A moment later he was on his way.

In his mind, Bruno replayed what had happened, trying to determine if he was safe now. Had he left anything behind in the house that the police could identify as his? No. His fingerprints—were

they on the gun? No, that was not a problem either. He hadn't once touched the revolver. What had he touched? The knob of the door to the room that held the coffin! But, he remembered, his hand had slipped, so the prints undoubtedly would be smeared. Evidently he was safe. No one had seen him enter or leave the house except Smith, who of course, was in no condition now to testify against him. Otherwise, only Anna knew that he had been there.

The cab pulled up in front of Bruno's shop. He paid the driver, then, carrying the book and the box under his arm again, got out and moved to the shop door. Behind him he heard the cab departing. Then another sound disturbed the quiet as he opened the door. The bell tinkled. He cursed it under his breath, realizing that the sound would probably awaken Anna.

She emerged from their living quarters as he was placing the book and the box on the counter. She was rubbing her eyes, only half-awake. He tried to hide the box beneath the counter, but he was not quick enough.

"Bruno, what is that? Oh, the suit box. It's good that you brought it back. We can use it again." She looked closely at her husband. His expression told her that something had gone wrong. "You did sell the suit, didn't you?"

"No."

"What happened?" she asked.

"He ... I ... He had no money," Bruno told her.

Anna sighed glumly. "Mr. Stebbins called, just after you left," she said. "He told me to tell you that he's coming for the rent in the morning. Bright and early." She lowered her eyes. "I told him it was all right, you were getting the money from a customer tonight ..."

"You told him that!" Bruno said sharply. "I asked you not to speak of this to anyone! Nobody was to know, not a soul!"

"When did you tell me that?"

"Perhaps I didn't say it—not in words. But you should have known! I told you the material was special! I told you ..." He interrupted himself, realizing that it was pointless and unfair to scold his wife for something that had actually been his own fault. "Never mind," he said apologetically. "I'm sorry. Forget it."

"Bruno, this is not like you," she said, peering at him intently again. "Did anything ...?"

"Please, Anna! I don't want to talk about it." He shoved the suit box at her. "Here—take this and burn it! Put it in the stove! And never speak of it again. Forget Mr. Smith. Forget that I made the suit. Forget everything!"

“But, Bruno, this is fine material,” she said, bewildered. “It’s the finest work you’ve ever done. If people could see it ...”

“Burn it! Burn it!” he screamed at her.

For a second, she was immobilized, shocked by the outburst. Then tears brimmed in her eyes and she turned and ran from the room, taking the suit box with her.

Bruno slumped, ashamed of his behavior. He had never before treated Anna so cruelly. The saddest part about it was that he could not explain his anger to her. All he could do was hope that in time she would forgive him.

Wearily, he went to the door of the shop and locked it. Returning, he picked up the book from the counter, then left the work area and entered the living quarters. Anna was in the kitchen, her back to him, removing the suit from the box. He paused, wanting to say something to her. But then, afraid that anything he might say would evoke more questions from her, he walked on to the bedroom, keeping silent. There, he dropped the book on the bed and got out of his jacket. He was so tired that every effort was painful.

“A fortune! A fortune for that!” he said crankily, looking at the book. “Paintings, jewels, antiques for a book that tells him to make a suit for a dead man! Stupid!” He picked up the book and opened the cover to the title page. The title was in solid Gothic lettering:

De Vermis Mysteriis

Bruno shrugged, unable to translate it. He opened the book to a place near the center. The page on the left contained text, printed in the same Latin as the title. On the right-hand page there was a drawing, a woodcut. It was an outline of a suit, Bruno realized suddenly recognizing the jacket, that it was the same suit that Smith had commissioned him to make. Beneath the drawing was a zodiacal chart, with lines extending upward to various parts of the outline of the suit, to the neck, arms, buttons, waist, trousers, legs.

Curious, Bruno turned to the next pair of pages. Again, there was Latin text on the left and a wood-cut on the right. Once more it was an outline of the suit, but now the suit was being worn by a skeleton. Staring at the bony frame and grinning skull, Bruno felt a sudden revulsion and fear.

Unable to resist the temptation, Bruno turned another page. The skeleton was gone. In its place, wearing the strange suit, was the figure of a handsome, smiling young man. Bruno felt both fascinated and revolted by what the series of drawings suggested—that the suit had the power to bring the dead back to life. He slapped the book

shut.

“Against God!” he murmured. “Devil’s work. It must be burned!”

Taking the book with him, Bruno left the bedroom and went to the kitchen. Anna was no longer there. At the stove, he lifted the lid, then started to drop the book into the fire. He suddenly realized, however, that the stove was cold. How could that be, he wondered. He had seen his wife burning the suit only a few minutes earlier. But, no, he had only seen her taking it from the box.

Lowering the stove lid, Bruno looked around the kitchen. The suit box was on the table, open. The suit was nowhere in sight. If it hadn’t been burned, where was it? And, for that matter, where was his wife?

“Anna ...” he called out softly, moving toward the curtained doorway.

There was no answer.

“Anna?” Something was decidedly wrong, he was sure of that.

Parting the curtains, he peered into the shop. It was dark.

“Anna?” he called out again, his voice thin and shaky.

He saw a faint movement from the direction of the shop window, then heard his wife speaking. She was addressing someone in a quiet, murmuring tone.

“I don’t know what we’ll do now. But maybe if people see how nice you look in it, someone will come in. We must do *something* ...”

Cautiously, perplexed, Bruno entered the shop and moved silently toward the front. As he neared the counter he saw that Anna was standing near the dummy.

“Anna ... what are you doing ...?” he asked.

The sound of his voice startled her. She took in a quick breath and turned to face him. “Oh ... Bruno ...”

As she moved to meet him, he saw that the dummy was now wearing the suit that he had ordered his wife to burn. The flecks of colored metal in the cloth glowed phosphorescently and seemed to swim about the surface.

“Anna ... Anna ...” Bruno said drearily. “The suit ... I told you to burn it ...”

“I know. But I couldn’t. The material is so fine, it’s so well-made. I thought ... I hoped ... What will it hurt if we keep it and let Otto wear it and someone—”

“Otto?”

Anna indicated the dummy. “It’s a name I made up for him—an old country name,” she explained. “When I am alone, sometimes I talk to him. He is like an old friend to me. I can tell him things that ... well,

that I could not say to anyone else.”

“Have I neglected you so much?” Bruno asked sadly. “So much that you must talk to a dummy?”

“You work so hard,” she said, lowering her eyes. “Work ... all the time ... and for what?”

“Anna, I’m sorry. But I must work to live. How will we eat if I do not work?”

“I know. But that does not keep me from being lonely. And when I am lonely I need someone to talk to. Otto—”

“Anna, please, we’ll talk about it some other time,” Bruno said, interrupting. “But now, do as I told you. Burn the suit.”

She made no move to obey. “Bruno, I don’t understand why. It makes no sense to me. All the work you put in on it. And we need money. Mr. Stebbins will be here in the morning for the rent. Have you forgotten that? Doesn’t it matter to you? What is so important about burning the suit?”

“No one must know that it ever existed,” he told her. “Believe me, Anna. Trust me. Please don’t ask me any more questions.”

“I *do* trust you. But I don’t see how burning the suit will help. Mr. Smith knows that it exists.”

“Mr. Smith is dead.”

She looked at him doubtfully. “Dead?”

“Yes, dead. Don’t ask me about it.”

“Bruno, you tell me a man is dead, when just a few days ago he was alive, and then say, don’t ask me about it? How did it happen? You said the suit was for his son. Won’t the son pay for it? Did you talk to him, ask him? Bruno, maybe there is still a chance that—”

“Anna, stop!” he said angrily. “I killed him!”

She stared at him in disbelief. “Mr. Smith’s son? You *killed* him?”

“No, no. Not the son. Mr. Smith. I killed Smith. It was an accident. But who will believe that?”

“You! Bruno, this makes no sense.”

“Anna, I don’t really understand it myself. It happened so quickly. It was so strange. I went to his house. He had no money, he couldn’t pay. But he wanted the suit. Anna, he had his son’s body in a coffin. He thought the suit would bring the boy back to life. He read about it in this,” he said, showing her the book. “I know how unbelievable it all sounds, but it’s the truth.”

“But why did you kill him? Because he could not pay? Bruno, that’s not like you.”

“That’s not the reason. He tried to take the suit from me. We fought.

He had a gun. As we struggled, it discharged. He ... He's dead."

"Oh, but, Bruno, you didn't murder him," Anna said. "It was an accident."

"Yes, I know. That's what I told you. It will not bring him back to life, though. The fact is, he is dead and I will be blamed. Now, do you see why the suit must be burned?"

"Yes," Anna replied, sighing. She put a hand on her husband's arm, touching him affectionately. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize ... Poor Bruno. I wish I could change it. I know how you must feel." She looked more closely at the book he was holding. "It told him that the suit would bring his one back to life? What kind of book is it?"

"I don't know. A book of magic. There is a spell for making a suit. The book must be burned too."

"No," Anna said firmly.

"No? Why not?"

"Bruno, we will burn nothing. Don't you see? If you have the book and the suit you can show them to the police. You can tell them honestly what happened and the book and the suit will be the proof."

He shook his head. "You know very little about the police," he said. "They would never believe me. The book and the suit will be proof, yes—proof to the police that I killed Smith."

"You don't *know* that!"

"I do! Anna, what was your first thought when I told you Smith was dead? You thought I killed him because he would not pay me. The police will think that too. And they'll think I stole the book. It's valuable, Anna. Smith paid a fortune for it. His paintings, his antiques, his jewels—he told me—he sold them all to buy the book."

"But if you tell the truth ..."

"I don't want to talk about it any more. The decision is made. We'll burn them, the book and the suit."

"Bruno, please, please," she begged. "For my sake, tell the police what happened."

"No!"

Anna took in a deep breath, strengthening herself. "Then I will tell them," she said.

"Anna ..." Bruno said, hurt.

She moved past him, going toward the counter. "It is for you that I am doing it," she told him.

Realizing that she intended to use the telephone that was resting on the counter, Bruno started after her. "Anna, I forbid it!"

She picked up the receiver. "Forbid if you want to, but I must do it

anyway,” she told him. “We cannot live with this murder on our souls ...”

Bruno’s fear became rage. He lunged at his wife, raising the book, making a weapon of it.

“No!” Anna cried, dropping the receiver and lifting her arm to protect herself.

Savagely, Bruno brought the book down. It struck Anna’s arm. She stumbled backwards. The phone, swept from the counter, crashed to the floor. Again, Bruno raised the book and brought it down. Instinctively, Anna lifted her arms to shield herself from the blow. The book hit her hands and she grabbed hold of it and tore it from her husband’s grasp.

Out of his mind with rage, Bruno reached for Anna’s throat. Trying to defend herself, she released her hold on the book and it went flying into the dimness. She clawed at Bruno’s hands, attempting to break his grip on her throat. But he was too strong for her and his fingers tightened around her neck.

“Help!” Anna cried weakly. “Otto ... Otto ...”

Bruno’s hands squeezed brutally.

“Otto ... help me ... help me ... Otto ...” Anna whimpered.

Bruno became aware of a sudden shimmering glow coming from the front of the shop. With his fingers still gripping his wife’s throat he looked up. The window dummy was suffused in the glow which was emanating from the suit. As Bruno stared, stunned, he saw the dummy’s head begin to turn as if Otto were responding to Anna’s plea for help. Bruno’s hold on his wife’s throat gradually loosened.

Otto moved. Mechanically, a leg raised. The dummy advanced a step, then another.

“My God!” Bruno said feebly, releasing his wife.

Sobbing, Anna looked toward the front of the shop. The weeping ceased. She screamed.

“Otto!”

Awkwardly, the dummy moved toward them. Its arms came up. Its face, lighted from below by the glow from the suit, was glassy-eyed, expressionless—but alive!

Terror-stricken, screaming wildly, Anna rose and ran to the door of the shop. But Bruno, transfixed by a combination of fear and fascination remained by the counter. He saw Anna unlock the door, then go shrieking into the night darkness. By then, the dummy was almost upon him.

“No! Go back!” Bruno shouted.

Otto’s stiff fingers reached for Bruno’s throat. From the dummy’s

unmoving mouth came the sound of a high-pitched, maniacal titter.

“Oh, God, no!” Bruno screamed.

Otto’s fingers found his throat and tightened. Immobilized by terror, Bruno could not even struggle. He gasped for breath. His lungs felt as if they were about to burst. The dummy’s face blurred before his eyes and he lost consciousness.

“You must find him!” Bruno told Foster, his voice thick with anguish. “Somewhere, he’s alive. A monster!” His hands trembled. The needle dropped from his fingers. His head dropped and his body began to tremble as he sobbed quietly.

Close to weeping himself, Foster put a hand on Bruno’s shoulder. “Easy ... control yourself ...” he said sympathetically. “Try to realize ... it didn’t actually happen ...”

Bruno’s body shuddered convulsively.

“There’s no such thing as magic,” Foster told him. “You know that, don’t you? A dummy, coming to life, it’s impossible. You’ve manufactured this story to cover up the truth ... whatever it is ... You have to face that fact before we can help you. Do you understand?”

Bruno covered his face with his hands, continuing to weep.

“Ah, well ... we’ll work it out,” Foster told him, rising.

“Finished, Doctor?” Max asked.

Foster hesitated, then, moving toward the doorway, replied, “Yes, for the time being.”

Max opened the door. Reaching it, Foster looked back. Bruno was still bent over, still sobbing. Foster shook his head sadly, then continued on his way. Max followed him out.

“Paranoid psychosis,” Foster said, as Max locked the door from the outside.

“If you say so, Doctor.”

“Interesting case,” Foster said. “How did he come to the asylum?”

“He could have come here as a doctor.”

“Well, I doubt that. I see no connection between tailoring and medicine—except, as I mentioned, the stitching.”

“Well, as you also said, Doctor, his story is obviously not true,” Max replied. Straightening, he smiled amusedly at Foster. “Or is it?”

“It couldn’t be.”

“Of course not.”

“If the story were true, where is the wife?” Foster said.

“You’ll be given the real case histories after you’ve reached your decision, Doctor,” Max told him. “Until then, I’m not allowed to tell

you any of the details.”

LUCY COMES TO STAY

Foster looked along the hallway. "Where do we go from here?"

"This way," Max replied, proceeding, selecting another key from the many on the ring.

They reached the end of the hallway, then turned to the left. Foster saw through the window that the storm had ended. The sky was still dark, however. He realized that it was probably early evening by now.

"Your next candidate calls herself Barbara," Max said, halting at a door.

"Barbara. 'B.' All your patients seem to have names that begin with 'B.' Bonnie, Bruno, now Barbara. And I'm looking for a B. Starr. Is it part of some plan or just coincidence?"

"I don't know about any plan, Doctor. So it must be coincidence."

"A woman ..." Foster felt a quickening of interest. Perhaps Dr. Rutherford's comment that Dr. Starr might be a female had been a clue he had let slip out unintentionally.

The room that Foster and Max entered was more comfortably furnished than the first. It had a bed rather than a cot, and the bed was covered with a spread that had a floral design. In addition to a chest, there was a vanity, with perfumes and cosmetics. The chairs, too, were an improvement, one overstuffed and another with a padded seat. Foster wondered if this was an indication that Barbara was Dr. Starr. It seemed logical that the person who had once been the head of the institution might be given preferential treatment, superior accommodations.

Barbara was a well-groomed, neatly-dressed young woman. She was not too young, however, to be Dr. Starr. Foster was attracted to her immediately. She was obviously suffering from an emotional strain, giving her a tense, severe look. But if it were not for that she would have been strikingly beautiful.

She smiled hesitantly as Foster and Max entered her room and addressed Foster. "How good of you to come," she said.

"You were expecting me?" he asked, surprised.

"You are a lawyer, aren't you?"

Foster shook his head. "Sorry, I'm afraid not," he replied, smiling amiably.

She was more than disappointed, she was angry. "I asked to see a lawyer!" she said sharply to Max. "I told you to send for one. Why haven't you done it?"

Max ignored the question. "This is Dr. Foster," he said to her, gesturing.

Barbara groaned. "Another doctor!" Dismayed, she moved to the chair with the padded seat and sat down, clasping her hands in her lap and staring glumly at her entwined fingers. "I ask for a lawyer, I get another doctor. Why? I'm not ill. A doctor can't help me. I need a lawyer. A lawyer would understand, would know it wasn't my fault."

"I haven't accused you of anything," Foster said, settling in the other chair. "Why are you so defensive?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him speculatively, then looked down at her hands again. "All doctors are alike," she said despairingly.

"Oh? What makes you so sure of that?"

"I happen to know a great deal about the medical profession," she told him.

"Ah ... that's interesting ..." Foster leaned forward a bit. "I wonder ... are you a doctor yourself?"

Again, Barbara raised her eyes. But then she looked away from Foster evasively.

"Or perhaps you studied medicine ... not seriously, but for your own ... oh, amusement?"

"Why are you asking me these questions?" Barbara wanted to know, facing him squarely again.

"Because I want to help you."

"Then leave me alone!" she said, angry again. "It wasn't my fault. But you wouldn't understand that."

"How can you be so certain?" He relaxed, leaning back. "Lawyers aren't the only ones who understand things. Other people besides lawyers are sometimes able to help if they have the opportunity. Of course, first, I'd have to know what you're talking about. Would you like to tell me?"

For a moment she was silent, thinking. "I had nothing to do with it—nothing!" she said finally. "It was ... It was Lucy."

"Oh."

Once more, she fixed her attention on her hands.

"Lucy ... you were saying ..." Foster said softly, gently urging her to continue.

"It's sort of a long and complicated story."

“Well, I have all the time in the world,” Foster told her. “Why don’t you just begin at the beginning and tell it as it happened and eventually you’ll get to the end. That seems easy, doesn’t it?”

She looked toward the window. “It was a sunny, beautiful, warm day, not at all like today,” she said. “I remember that very clearly ... the warmth ... the sunlight ... so bright and cheerful ...”

In the passenger’s seat of the open car, Barbara happily watched the panorama of splendid old homes and spacious lawns passing by. They gave her confidence, made her feel secure. They were all so much like her own home.

The conservatively-dressed, somewhat older man at the wheel glanced over at Barbara. “How do you feel?” he asked. His manner was stiffly solicitous.

“Fine,” she replied, smiling joyfully. She faced toward him. “Oh, George. If you only knew how wonderful it is to be going home again.”

“I hope you’ll be happy.”

“I *am* happy.”

“I hope you’ll continue to be happy, I mean.”

“Of course I will,” she said reassuringly. “Don’t worry. It won’t be like the last time. That’s all over. I’m sure of it. As positive of it as I’ve ever been of anything in my whole life.”

“Fine, fine ...” he said, pleased. “That’s a good sign, Barbara. It’s up to you, you know. You have to want to be well.”

Barbara sat up straight and peered intently through the windshield. “Almost there ...” she said excitedly. “Almost home ...”

The house was a handsome, brick, two-story Tudor structure. Barbara gazed at it delightedly as George drove the car onto the grounds, then parked in the drive.

“Well, ... here we are ...” George said, getting out.

“Yes, isn’t it wonderful.”

He circled the rear of the car and opened the door on the passenger’s side. Barbara got out and stood in the drive looking admiringly at the house as George got her overnight bag from the rear seat. Then, seeing a brief flurry of movement at a window, she frowned.

“Something wrong?” George asked.

“No, I ... I don’t know. I could swear I saw someone looking out the parlor window just now,” she replied.

“Well ...” George began, unconcerned.

"I thought ..., I thought it was Lucy," Barbara said tightly.

George looked at her disappointedly. "Barbara, remember what you promised me at the hospital? You're never going to mention her name again. That's what you told me."

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "But I saw someone. And Lu ... There I go, I almost did it again. George, please forgive me. I'm not quite into the routine yet, that's all." Frowning again, she looked toward the house again. "But there is someone inside, isn't there?"

"Yes," he answered, leading the way to the entrance.

"Who is it?"

"You'll see."

"George, tell me. I'm not a child."

"Patience," he said.

As they approached the flagstone stoop at the entrance, the door opened. A plump, matronly-looking woman in a nurse's uniform appeared, smiling genially.

"A nurse?" Barbara said, dismayed.

George addressed the woman in the doorway. "Miss Higgins, this is my sister, Barbara."

"Hello!" Miss Higgins responded brightly. "I've heard so much about you," she told Barbara. "How nice to meet you."

Barbara nodded woodenly. "Yes ... how do you do ..."

Moving past Miss Higgins, Barbara and her brother entered a nicely-furnished, cheerfully-decorated hall.

Barbara whispered to George, "I don't need a nurse!"

"It's only temporary, until you get settled in again," he told her. "The doctor suggested it. Why does it upset you? It seems like a normal enough thing to me."

"But ..."

Miss Higgins, having closed the door, had now caught up to them. "Here, sir—I'll take that," she said to George, reaching for the overnight bag. In possession of it, she turned to Barbara. "Shall we go upstairs now?" she said spiritedly, as if addressing a child.

"I just got here," Barbara protested.

"Your bed is all ready, dear," Miss Higgins said. "You can pop right into bed."

Barbara turned to her brother. "Bed? In the middle of the afternoon?"

"You've had quite a long trip, dear," Miss Higgins said, refusing to be cut out of the discussion. "You must get some rest. Oh, that's the first rule. When we're weary, we rest. And it does make a lot of sense

when you think about it, doesn't it?"

"But I'm not in the least bit tired," Barbara said, still addressing her brother.

"Barbara, you promised me, remember?" George responded. "You told me you'd follow the doctor's instructions. That was our agreement, wasn't it? I'm sure you want to keep your promise."

"Well, yes, of course. But this is my home. It seems to me that I ought to have something to say about ..."

"Our home," George said, interrupting. "And I hope that from now on we'll be together here, always. We can be happy." He reached into a jacket pocket, bringing out a pipe. "You don't want to go back to the hospital again, do you?"

The suggestion caused her to shudder, "No, of course not."

"I sincerely hope that won't be necessary—ever," George said. "But, who knows, if you refuse to follow the doctor's orders."

"Doctor always knows what's best," Miss Higgins said. She moved on to the foot of the stairs. "Come along, dear," she said to Barbara, motioning with her free hand.

Sadly, defeat showing in her eyes and bearing, Barbara followed the nurse to the stairs. Miss Higgins stepped back to let her pass.

"You're not coming up?" Barbara said to her brother, pausing and glancing back.

George was loading his pipe, digging the bowl into a pouch of tobacco. "I'll see you later," he told her, preoccupied.

"I thought we could talk," Barbara said.

"You're supposed to rest," he replied. "But, if you have any trouble, I'm sure Miss Higgins will be happy to keep you company."

"But, George ..."

He raised his eyes and his stern look silenced her, "Barbara, there will be plenty of time for discussion—and more opportune moments," he said. Then, giving his attention to his pipe again, he turned away and left the room.

Barbara stole a glance at Miss Higgins. The nurse was still smiling cheerfully, professionally.

"Doctor—" Miss Higgins began.

"—knows best. Yes, I know," Barbara said glumly, moving on, ascending the stairs.

Barbara's room was not far from the second-floor landing. It was a bright, colorful room, entirely feminine. The bed, she noted as she entered, was turned down. She stood near it for a few moments, looking about, and felt somewhat better. After all, she was home, and

no matter what else happened, she had that to be thankful for.

Miss Higgins got a nightgown from the overnight bag and placed it on the bed. "Time for nighty-night," she said obsequiously.

Barbara winced.

Miss Higgins went into the adjoining bathroom. "You're so lucky to have a brother who cares," she called out. "It makes it so easy for you. All you have to do is follow his instructions and you'll be fine in no time."

Barbara began undressing. "Yes, George has always been very firm," she said listlessly.

"Someone has to be strong."

"Oh, he's that. Always so sure of himself, and so businesslike about it. Sometimes I think it would be better if he had a weakness or two ... some little trifling flaw." She slipped the nightgown over her head.

"Oh, no," Miss Higgins said, emerging from the bathroom carrying a glass that was half-filled with a cloudy liquid. "You might be tempted to take advantage of a weakness," she said. "That wouldn't be good for you. Your brother knows that, I'm sure."

"He could be a little more flexible," Barbara complained. "Now, for instance, it's ridiculous, going to bed at this hour. I feel like a kindergarten child, taking my nap according to schedule."

"Doctor says you need a nap every day before tea-time—to keep up your strength."

"But I'm not tired. I'll never sleep."

Miss Higgins handed her the glass. "This will take care of that," she told her.

Barbara looked down into the cloudy liquid. "What is it? It looks like chalk."

"It's a sedative, dear. To calm your nerves. Come now, drink it down. Be a good girl."

"But I am calm! Perfectly calm!" Barbara said crossly.

"Then why are you raising your voice, dear?"

"Because this is so silly. Going to bed in the middle of the afternoon! Taking something to calm me when I'm already calm!"

"Dear, if you were calm, you'd take your medicine like a nice girl and not protest."

"That doesn't make any more sense than any of the rest of it!"

"Now, look what you're doing," Miss Higgins said chastisingly. "You're getting yourself excited. Look at your hand—it's shaking. Naughty-naughty."

Barbara tried to still the trembling. "If they'd just let me have one of

my pills ...”

“Oh, no, dear,” Miss Higgins said disapprovingly. “We’re not to have any more of those things. Doctor says they’re bad for you.”

“I know, I know ...” Barbara said wearily. “Anything I want is always bad for me.” Suppressing the trembling, she raised the glass.

“Good girl.”

Barbara downed the cloudy liquid, shuddered at the taste, then handed the glass to Miss Higgins.

“Much better,” the nurse told her. “It’s always better to do what Doctor says. Now,” she cooed, indicating the bed, “in we go.”

Barbara got in under the sheet and coverlet. She watched Miss Higgins as the woman placed the empty glass on the vanity then went to the windows and closed the blinds.

“All comfy?” Miss Higgins asked, picking up the glass from the vanity and going on to the door.

Barbara stared at her with resignation, remaining silent.

“Sleep now,” Miss Higgins said, opening the door. “I’ll look in on you in a little while and make sure you’re snug. Tonight,” she said, smiling mechanically, “we’ll have a nice chat, you and I. Oh, we’ll talk, talk, talk—about anything you wish, my dear.”

“You’ll be staying here in the evening, too?” Barbara replied, making no effort to hide her dismay.

“Why, of course I will. I’ll be here all the time. So, see? You have nothing to fear. Your brother has given me the room right next to yours. He’s thought of everything. Aren’t you the lucky, lucky girl!”

“Yes ...”

Miss Higgins wagged her fingers at Barbara. “Sleep tight.” Then she departed, closing the door.

Barbara sighed sorrowfully. The presence of Miss Higgins in the house was a terrible disappointment. She had thought that she and George would be alone, that life would be exactly as it had been before, the two of them, happy together. Well, almost happy. Until Lucy had spoiled it all.

But with a stranger in the house, they would have to be careful of what they said to each other, cautious about the way they acted. Strangers were always, misinterpreting things. Always, as George often said, making mountains out of mole hills, reading the most outrageous things into innocent words and gestures.

Barbara pulled the covers up to her chin and closed her eyes. But she knew she would not be able to sleep. Her mind would not be still. What she really needed was one of her pills. Why couldn’t the doctor—and George—understand that. The pills weren’t harmful. Just the

opposite. They gave her the strength, mental and physical, that she had always lacked. If she had a pill right now, she could ...

Dimly, Barbara heard the ringing of the telephone. Her eyes opened wide. She heard the ringing again. Quickly, she got out of bed and went to the bedroom door and listened. Once more, the telephone rang. She opened the door a crack and heard George's voice. He had answered the telephone. She slipped quietly out of the room and went to the landing. Looking over the bannister, she could see George in the hall.

Lowering the receiver, he called out, "Miss Higgins, it's for you!"

The nurse responded from somewhere on the lower floor, then, moments later, appeared and accepted the receiver from George. He started to leave—but then paused.

"Hello. Yes?" Miss Higgins said. "Yes, it is—speaking. Oh, no! Where did you say? Yes, I know where it is. How is she? No danger? Are you sure? But she's seventy-eight. Yes, yes, I'll come as soon as I can—at once!"

Miss Higgins hung up the phone.

"What is it?" George asked. "I wasn't eavesdropping, but she said it was the hospital calling. I thought it might be ..."

"Oh, dear, it's my mother," Miss Higgins told him, distraught. "She's had an accident—knocked down by a cyclist while she was crossing the street. I must go to her."

George looked annoyed. "Right now? Can't it wait? What about your patient?"

"She's in bed and under sedation," Miss Higgins replied. "She'll sleep for hours. If I could just run into town and see how Mum's doing," she said, increasingly distressed, "I'd be back by evening."

"Well, I suppose, under the circumstances ..." George said grudgingly. He looked at his watch. "There's a train, I believe, in twenty minutes. I'll drive you to the station. You will be back by evening, though?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I promise," she replied, moving away. "I'll just get my purse ..."

"You're positive Barbara will sleep?" George called after her.

"Like a baby!"

George looked toward the stairs.

Afraid of being seen, Barbara drew back. Silently, she returned to her room and got back under the sheet and coverlet. A few moments later, as she had expected, she heard her brother's footfalls on the stairs. She closed her eyes, feigning sleep. The bedroom door opened, then, after a second, closed. She heard George descending the stairs.

Excited, Barbara got out of bed again and went to the window. Peeking through the slats of the closed blind she saw her brother and the nurse leave the house and get into George's car. The car backed out of the drive, then disappeared up the street, headed in the direction of the train station. Barbara sighed, relieved. Alone. Alone in her own home.

Barbara crossed hurriedly to the bathroom. Inside, she switched on the light, then went straight to the counter that held the basins and opened one of the built-in drawers. The drawer contained a miscellany of lipsticks and cosmetics and a pair of scissors. She pawed through the contents hastily, her hands trembling.

Unable to find what she was looking for in the drawer, she slammed it closed and opened another. Among other items, this drawer held a plastic tray of metal curlers. Barbara began sorting through them, picking them up one by one and peering into the openings, then discarding them. At last, she found the curler she was seeking. Her eyes brightening with delight, as she saw the transparent plastic pill container.

Triumphant, Barbara opened the container. A blue capsule dropped out into the palm of her hand. She gazed at it in extreme pleasure, admiring it as if it were a jewel of priceless value. Her breathing was deep, her whole body trembled with excitement. With a flourish, she popped the capsule into her mouth and swallowed. The effect was almost instant. She relaxed. The tightness left her expression.

Again, Barbara rolled a pill from the container into the palm of her hand. Once more she put it to her mouth, then tipped her head back and swallowed. She smiled, a smile of supreme contentment. Then, languidly, she placed the plastic container back inside the curler and dropped the curler into the drawer and closed it. At peace, she switched off the bathroom light and returned to the bedroom.

Entering the dimness, Barbara abruptly halted and froze. Her eyes widened. The effect of the capsules—so soothing, so strengthening—was suddenly lost. Seated in the chair at the vanity was a young woman. She was approximately Barbara's own age, but that was the only similarity between them. Her manner was assertive and self-assured. At the moment, she was smiling mockingly.

"Lucy!" Barbara said, stunned.

"Hello, luv."

"How did you get in here?"

"It wasn't easy," Lucy replied flippantly. "But I've always had a talent for that sort of thing, haven't I?" Her smile faded. "It was rather a bore," she said. "And the waiting. I've been waiting ever since you got home."

“Where?”

“In the garage,” Lucy replied. “That’s where I telephoned from.”

“Telephoned? You ... you mean that was you who called? Not the hospital?”

“Well, I had to get them out of the house, didn’t I? And, of course, I knew he’d play the gentleman and drive her to the station. George is so predictable. I wonder if that’s why I loathe him.”

“Lucy, I wish you wouldn’t say that.”

“Oh, bother!” She frowned. “What’s the matter? Aren’t you glad to see me?”

“Of course,” Barbara replied nervously. “But if he finds you here, you know what will happen. He’ll be furious. He might ... He might do anything!”

“That’s why we have to work quickly,” Lucy said, rising.

“I don’t understand.”

“Of course you don’t. I haven’t explained it to you yet. We’ll—”

Barbara swayed slightly. She reached out for the door frame to steady herself.

“What is it?” Lucy asked, disturbed.

“Nothing. I just felt a little faint ...”

Lucy looked at her sharply. “Have you been taking those pills again?”

“No. No, no,” Barbara replied hastily. “That’s all over with ... I swear. I don’t know what—. Yes, I do. The nurse gave me a sedative.”

“No, she didn’t,” Lucy said. “She thought she did, but, in fact, she didn’t. I replaced it before you even got home. Are you positive you haven’t been in the pills again?”

Avoiding Lucy’s eyes, Barbara moved to the bed and sat down. “I give you my word, honest.” She took in a deep breath. “I’m all right now. I’m fine. As good as ever.”

“A pity your brother doesn’t think so,” Lucy said sourly. “But, of course, it’s obvious why he doesn’t. Things wouldn’t be quite so nice for George if you were ‘as good as ever.’ ”

“Please, Lucy! Don’t say things like that. Why do you do it? You know it upsets me.”

“I say it because it’s the truth,” Lucy replied tartly. “You know it’s the truth, too, if you’d only admit it. Why, for one thing, did he send you to the hospital?”

“To take the cure,” Barbara said defensively.

“Hah! And were you cured?”

Barbara looked away. “The doctor let me come home.”

"Doctors are all alike—fools and charlatans. Barbara, look at me. You know I'm right about George. He doesn't want you to be cured."

Barbara put her hands to her ears and closed her eyes tightly. "Stop! I won't listen!"

"You better listen," Lucy warned. "You may not get another chance. Your time is running out, dear. Face it. Instead of fighting me, you ought to be thanking me. If it weren't for me, George would have a free hand with you. How would you like that?"

Barbara opened her eyes. "Don't be angry, please," she begged. "I just wish you wouldn't talk like that about George," she said, lowering her hands. "He's really very ... very ..."

"'Loathsome' is the word, I believe." She turned away and moved toward the windows. "Look at the way he treats you. It's Victorian, for heaven's sake. He obviously doesn't trust you. Shutting you up here in this room. That nurse!" She looked through the slats of the blind. "She's not really your nurse, you know. She's your guard, your keeper."

"No. George wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Oh, wouldn't he?"

"It's doctor's orders," Barbara said. "He wants me to have a nurse."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, because ... well, I ..."

"Because George told you. You didn't hear it from the doctor, though, did you? Oh, no. The doctor released you. Would he do that if you still needed a nurse?" She faced toward Barbara. "Think about this, dear: Who owns this house?"

"I do. You know that. When Father died, he left everything to me."

"Suppose, just suppose, something happened to you. Who would have 'everything' then?"

"Lucy, please don't say that," Barbara begged, tears forming in her eyes.

"The truth, dear. It's about time you met it face to face. You've been hiding from it long enough. Too long. Look what hiding has got you, locked up in your own bedroom, with a keeper to watch over you night and day. Do you know what's next? Let's take a guess. Is it possible that George might have you put away for good?"

"No! He wouldn't! He *couldn't*!"

"Begging your pardon, Barbara, he *could*. So easily. All he has to do is tell the doctor that you're much too difficult to control at home. It would be so simple, so easy for him."

"But they wouldn't just take his word for it!"

“Oh, he’ll have that nurse to back him up. Miss Cuddly-Poo. She doesn’t have a brain cell in her head. How long do you think you can continue to follow her orders, her treating you like an infant? Not long—and you know it.”

“I’ll do it. Somehow, I’ll ... Well, I’ll just do it, that’s all. She won’t be here forever.”

“She’ll be here as long as George wants her. And you’ll get sicker and sicker of her. And the minute you misbehave ... Oh, dear, you know what will happen then. She’ll set her mind against you. She’ll tell the doctor that you’re a ‘problem.’ And that, dear Barbara, will be the end of it.”

“But it’s not true,” Barbara protested. “You *know* it’s not true!”

“What good will it do you for me to know? George won’t listen to me. You know that. He doesn’t even want you to see me. That’s so, isn’t it?”

Barbara lowered her eyes again.

“Isn’t it?” Lucy insisted.

“Yes ... yes, it’s so.” She looked up. “What am I going to do?” she asked plaintively, desperate.

“We’ve got to get you away from here. That’s certain,” Lucy replied. “And there isn’t much time.”

“But if I stay with you, he’ll find me. Where can I go?”

“I’ve given that some thought,” Lucy answered. “We’ll take a room somewhere. In some out-of-the-way place.”

“I don’t know what that will solve,” Barbara said unhappily.

“It will give you a chance to get well, really well,” Lucy explained. “You can’t do that here. Not with Miss Mush-For-Brains watching you all the time. And George just waiting for you to make a mistake so he can send you away. We’ll make you well, well enough to be on your own. And then, my dear, we’ll get you a lawyer, a *good* lawyer.”

“Won’t that cost money? Do you have any?”

“No, but you do. That hundred pounds you put away for a party dress.”

Barbara stared at her in surprise. “How do you know about that?”

“You told me. Don’t you remember?”

“No.”

“Well, you did. How else would I know about it? Do you think I have strange powers or something?”

“No. No, I ...” She started to rise. “I’ll get it.”

“There’s no hurry,” Lucy said, halting her with a gesture. “We can’t leave now, not in broad daylight. Someone would be sure to see us.

Besides, you know, we'll need a car."

"You say that as if you could pull a car out of the air."

"Out of the garage," Lucy said. "Tonight—after George is asleep."

"What will you do until then?" Barbara asked.

Lucy frowned thoughtfully, then abruptly brightened. "I'll stay in the room next to yours," she said. "That nurse won't be using it." She moved toward the bedroom door. "George will be back any second now," she said. "If he catches me here, it'll be curtains, I'm afraid."

"Lucy ..."

"Don't fret, luv," Lucy said confidently, opening the door. "I'm with you again. It will all be all right—if you just stay off those pills."

"I will. I promise."

"Then you have nothing to worry about. Just leave everything to me." She smiled fleetingly, then went out, closing the door after her.

After a moment, Barbara heard the door to the room next door close. She looked toward the bathroom, drawn by the knowledge that there were more blue capsules in the plastic container. But a second later her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of her brother's car pulling into the driveway.

Barbara got up quickly, went to the window, and peered out through the slats. George was getting out of the car. When he headed for the entrance, she left the window and scurried back to the bed and got in under the sheet and coverlet. Suppose he came to her room again? She was breathing too hard—excited—and he would surely realize that she wasn't asleep. What if he asked her questions?

She heard the downstairs door close. Then silence. Evidently he wasn't coming up. Her breathing became normal. Once more, she glanced toward the bathroom. One more pill wouldn't hurt. It would be a long time before she would have a chance to take another if she went away with Lucy.

But again the opportunity was lost. She now heard footfalls on the stairs. Evidently George was coming up to check on her after all. She closed her eyes. Fortunately, her breathing was still even. He was in the hallway now. Getting closer. He was almost ...

She heard the door open.

"Barbara ...?" It was George speaking to her, his voice soft.

She pretended to be sound asleep ... drifting ...

"Barbara?"

Careful of the breathing ... in, out, in, out ... steady.

She heard the quiet click of the latch. Then footfalls along the hallway, then descending the stairs. She had done it! She was safe!

"This Lucy—you haven't told me who she is," Foster said, when Barbara broke off her story to regain her composure.

"Who she is?" she replied, agitated. "She's Lucy."

"Yes, but what is her relationship to you? A friend?"

"Yes, of course she's a friend."

"Nothing more? No blood relationship?"

"I don't see what that has to do with anything," Barbara replied, suddenly hostile.

"If I'm going to help you, I have to know things like that, that's all," Foster explained.

"Well, she's a friend, but closer than a friend, but not a cousin or anything of that sort."

"Yes ... Is it possible that she's you? Your other self, perhaps?"

Barbara looked toward Max. "Are you sure this man is a doctor?" she asked. "He talks like one of your patients."

Max grinned broadly, but did not reply.

"Let me explain," Foster said to Barbara. "I get the impression—I could be wrong, but, I get the impression that Lucy is speaking your own secret thoughts. Thoughts, that is, that you wouldn't say out loud. So, I wonder. Isn't it possible that you created Lucy in order to have someone who could say what you were thinking?"

"And how do you explain the fact that we're two different people?" Barbara asked.

"Physically, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have only your word for that. I don't doubt that you saw her—but perhaps only in your mind. That is, in your imagination."

"George saw her. He detested her."

"Well, let's think about that," Foster said. "Was it a real Lucy he detested? Or was it the creation of your imagination? He would be able to contend with a real, living, breathing person. But a creature of the mind—an illusion, a phantom—that would be difficult to deal with."

Barbara sighed wearily. "Oh, you're a doctor, all right," she said. "Make the patient fit your diagnosis—that's your solution."

"Lucy made a reference to doctors," Foster said interestedly. "She

said, 'They're all alike,' or something like that. You and she apparently have the same opinion on that issue."

"There are a great many people in this world who have a low opinion of doctors," Barbara countered. "Does that mean that I created all of them in my imagination—as you accuse me of creating Lucy?"

Foster smiled. "No, of course not." He settled back in the overstuffed chair. "I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have interrupted your line of thought," he said. "Please go on."

"I don't think I want to say any more," Barbara said, pouting.

"I want to help you. Remember?"

"Only a lawyer can help me."

"That's an assumption," Foster said. "But, if you're right, and you convince me of it, I might be able to get you a lawyer."

She looked at him worriedly. "You're not just saying that ...?"

"No. There is a catch, however. I can't decide whether I believe you or not until after I've heard the rest of your story."

For a second, she was silent, still studying him. Then she said, "You'll have to believe in Lucy. Otherwise, what's the point?"

"I'll do this," Foster replied. "I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. For the sake of the story, I'll assume that Lucy is real. All right?"

"I suppose that's the best I can expect from a doctor," she replied sardonically.

Later in the afternoon, Barbara heard the phone ring again. As she had earlier, she slipped quietly from her room and went to the head of the stairs. Crouching by the bannister, she listened as George took the call.

"Yes? Miss Higgins? She wasn't? Yes, I understand. That *is* strange. You'll be coming back tonight, then, I assume. If I remember correctly, there's a late train—arrives here about eleven."

Barbara giggled softly, aware of what Miss Higgins was telling her brother—that she had gone off on a wild goose chase.

"No, I don't think I should. Barbara will undoubtedly be awake by then. Why don't you take a cab from the station? I'll reimburse you for the fare."

Barbara made a glum face. Her keeper obviously was coming back. She had hoped that she would stay away at least overnight.

"Very well. I'll expect you then."

George placed the receiver in the cradle and glanced up the stairs. Barbara drew back quickly, then made her way silently back to her room and slipped in under the sheet and coverlet. She listened for a

sound on the stairs, but there was none.

All the activity and strain had tired her. She closed her eyes now not to fool George in case he came to her room, but because she felt genuinely sleepy. Drifting off, she thought about Lucy. She was glad she had returned. Lucy was so strong. She always knew exactly what to do and had the courage to do it. Without Lucy to give her strength, Barbara would let people take advantage of her.

Barbara was awakened by a touch on her arm. Stirring, she opened her eyes, then blinked into the light coming from the bathroom. She found Lucy standing beside the bed.

“Wake up!” Lucy said crisply.

Barbara stretched and yawned.

“Come along, luv!”

Barbara still felt weary. She closed her eyes again, needing just another minute or so of rest.

“Up, up!” Lucy insisted. “Hurry, now, and get dressed! It’s time to go!”

Groggily, Barbara sat up and stared into the dimness, clearing her mind.

“You are the slow one,” Lucy said, exasperated. “You’re acting just like you used to when you took those horrible pills. Are you doing it by memory?”

“Shhh, not so loud!” Barbara cautioned. “He’ll hear you!”

“George?” Lucy shook her head, smiling. “Don’t worry about him, luv. I gave him that sedative that Miss Cuddly-Poo had for you. Dumped it in his tea while he was on the phone. Loathsome George is sleeping like a baby.”

“Are you sure he’ll stay asleep?” Barbara asked anxiously.

“Positive.” She got a car key from the pocket of her dress and showed it to Barbara. “Look! And he didn’t even feel it when I took it from him.”

Excited again, Barbara rose and moved toward the bathroom. “What about Miss Higgins?” she asked.

“By the time she gets here we’ll be gone,” Lucy replied confidently, trailing after her. She halted at the bathroom doorway. “What are you waiting for? Why aren’t you getting dressed?”

Barbara stared longingly at the drawer that held the container of capsules. “I’m still a little groggy ... confused ...” she said. She opened the drawer.

“Are you sure it’s that?” Lucy asked, concerned, moving in behind her.

"Yes ..."

"You look a little faint, luv," Lucy said. "We can't have that. You've got to have your wits about you if we're going to pull this off."

"I'm all right," Barbara assured her. "I'm just nervous." She forced a thin smile. "I'm not used to so much excitement. Perhaps I should have taken that sedative ... or something ..., to calm me, I mean."

Lucy laughed. "There's the difference between us. Excitement sets me straight—I love it!"

Trying to be nonchalant about it, Barbara opened the drawer. "I want to take some of my things," she said. "My curlers and ..."

"There, that's what I need!" Lucy said, reaching past her. She took the scissors from the drawer.

"What do you want with the shears?" Barbara asked, puzzled.

Lucy clicked the scissors blades open. "To cut the telephone cord, silly," she replied, smiling mischievously. "When old Miss Mush-For-Brains comes back and finds you gone she'll be in a proper snit. We don't want her giving the alarm, do we?"

"No ... you're right, of course. I just didn't think of it."

"Well, I did." She moved toward the bathroom doorway, then paused. "Now, you hurry," she said to Barbara. "While I'm down in the hall, you get dressed. Remember, I expect to find you ready to go when I get back." She broke out in a wide grin. "I say, luv ..."

"Yes?"

"This is a lark, isn't it!" Lucy said happily. "Just like old times."

Barbara nodded, smiling. "Just like old times," she replied.

"We'll have great fun together, luv." She moved on. "Hurry, now ..."

Barbara heard the bedroom door open, then close. She began a frantic search for the curler that held the container of capsules. But when she found it, she hesitated. She had to be strong, she had to resist. She didn't need the blue pills anymore. Lucy would be with her.

Trembling but determined, Barbara dropped the curler back into the drawer and closed it. She turned away from the counter and left the bathroom. She could do without the pills—she was sure of it. All that was required was a little will power. And she had that now that Lucy was back.

Hastily, Barbara got underclothes from a drawer, then a suit and shoes from the closet. Dressing, she wondered what was taking Lucy so long. It would require only a minute or so to dash down the stairs, snip the cord, then return. Had George awakened? Had he caught Lucy with the shears?

Barbara felt herself trembling again, frightened by the notion that George had discovered Lucy. She went to the bedroom door, opened it a crack, and peeked out. Lucy was not in the corridor. She listened intently, but no sound came from the ground floor. Was that good or bad? She wasn't sure.

One pill. She needed one pill to settle herself down. One for the road, so to speak. Becoming increasingly frantic, she raced to the bathroom and yanked open the drawer. She had no trouble finding the curler this time. Her hands shaking, she extracted the container from it. A moment later, she had a capsule in the palm of her hand. Near panic, Barbara popped it into her mouth, then swallowed. The effect was almost immediate. The anxiety subsided. With one more pill, she could conquer it completely.

"What are you doing!" It was Lucy's voice, sharp, coming from behind her. Raising her eyes, she saw Lucy's image in the mirror.

"I thought you said you were through with those things!" Lucy said, as Barbara turned to face her.

"Please ... just this once ..." Barbara begged. "This is an emergency."

Lucy extended a hand, her expression icy. "Give them to me!"

Barbara tightened her grip on the container. "I need them! Lucy, please! Try to understand! This will be the last time! I promise!"

"You promised before. Give them to me!"

"I can't!" Her body was shaking again. The effect of the first pill was lost, now she needed the second desperately. "Just one more ..."

"No! I'm not going to watch you ruin yourself!" Lucy told her. She reached out again. "*Barbara, give me those blasted pills!*"

Barbara pressed back against the counter. "Only *one* more! Is that so much to ask? Just *one*! Then, I promise ..."

"Oh, I'm sick of your promises!" Lucy snapped. "Either you stop now, Barbara, or ... or we're through! There, that's it! Give me those pills or I'm finished with you!"

Barbara stared at her, shocked by the ultimatum. "Lucy, you couldn't do that to me," she said feebly. "I need you."

"You said you weren't taking them. You lied to me."

"I can't help it," Barbara told her. "I don't *want* to take them. But I can't help it. I just can't help it!"

"You mean you don't want to help it!" Lucy replied angrily. "You've always had a choice, Barbara. George or the pills. Me or the pills. And the pills have always won." She looked at her challengingly. "Do you know why? Because deep down, dear, you hate George ... and you hate me!"

“No! You’re my best friend ...”

Lucy suddenly reached out and snatched the container from Barbara’s hand.

“Lucy! Please!”

Lucy turned her back to her and moved into the bedroom. “These are your friends!” she said. “Your only friends.”

“Please, please ...” Barbara begged, following her.

“Oh, I’m good enough for you when you’re in trouble,” Lucy said bitterly. “Yes, when there’s no one else around to talk to.”

“I need the pill for your sake, Lucy. Really, I do. So I won’t be a bother to you. You know how annoyed you get when I’m nervous. If I have a pill, I won’t be that way. I’ll be calm—just like you.”

Lucy ignored the rationalization. “I’m good enough to lie for you, to get you out of messes,” she went on. “But I’ve never been good enough for George—or any of the others of your kind. And now,” she said acidly, “I can’t even win out over a handful of pills!” She whipped around and headed back toward the bathroom. “Well, I’ll take care of that!”

“No!” Barbara cried out, hurrying after her.

At the counter, Lucy dumped the capsules into the palm of her hand, then turned on the tap, intending to wash them down the drain.

“Oh, God! Oh, no, Lucy, don’t ...”

Lucy hesitated. She looked at Barbara sorrowfully, then turned off the water. “Barbara ... I did something for you today ... you don’t know about it yet ...” she said quietly. “But, still, it wasn’t enough. Nothing could ever be enough.” She moved past Barbara, leaving the bathroom.

“Lucy ...”

“No, I’m getting out,” Lucy told her. “It’s finished. It’s ...” She halted. Facing Barbara, who had followed her from the bathroom, she looked at her pityingly. “You want these?” she said, opening her hand and displaying the pills. “All right, luv—here, take them!”

Viciously, Lucy threw the pills into Barbara’s face. As Barbara threw up her arms to protect herself and went reeling backwards, the capsules scattered in all directions.

“ ’Bye, luv! It’s been fun!”

The door slammed closed.

“Lucy—” Barbara peered vacantly through the dimness at the door. “Lucy—”

There was no reply.

Panic seized her. She raced to the door and flung it open. “Lucy!”

she shrieked. "Come back! Come back! I need you!"

Silence.

Barbara ran into the hallway. "Lucy! Come back!" She ran on to the stairs. "I don't want the pills! I want you! Lucy! I promise! I'll never touch them again!"

There was no answer.

"Lucy! Lucy!"

From outside the house came the sound of a car motor. Lucy was leaving, driving away in George's car!

Barbara went flying down the steps. "Lucy! Don't leave me! Come back!"

She reached the hall and raced to the front door. The car was pulling away.

"Oh, God!" she wept, battling the doorknob. "Lucy, don't leave me!"

The door came open. Barbara started to rush out into the darkness—but then halted. A figure was approaching the doorway. Not Lucy. It was ...

"Miss Barbara—what are you doing?"

Miss Higgins loomed large in front of Barbara, blocking the way.

"I've got to go out ..." Barbara said frantically, trying to get past her.

"At this hour of night?"

"It's Lucy," Barbara said. "I've got to talk to her. She doesn't understand."

"Lucy?" Miss Higgins said, perplexed.

"Please, let me get past," Barbara pleaded. "She just left. I heard the car pull away. George's car. She took it. You see, we ... Please, I don't have time to explain." She tried to squeeze past the woman, but Miss Higgins moved agilely to close the opening.

"That wasn't your brother's car you heard," she told Barbara. "That was the cab I came in." She advanced, forcing Barbara back into the hall. "There's no one outside," she said firmly. "No one, believe me."

"Then she's still here!" Barbara said, relieved. Turning away from Miss Higgins, she called into the house. "Lucy!"

"Dear, where is your brother?" Miss Higgins asked worriedly, closing the door. "I think he ought to know about this."

"George? Oh, he's ... I don't know. In his study, I suppose." She hurried to the foot of the stairs. "Lucy! Where are you? Lucy, come out! I want to talk to you! I can explain!"

"Maybe your brother saw your friend," Miss Higgins suggested. "Let's find out, shall we? I wonder why he isn't out here—all this

commotion.”

“He’s asleep,” Barbara told her. “Lucy gave him a sedative.”

“A sedative?” Miss Higgins said, frowning, moving toward the entrance to George’s study. “Well, I don’t know about that. Is she qualified? Is she authorized? This is most unusual ... most strange ...”

“Lucy!” Barbara called up the stairs.

“Come along, dear,” Miss Higgins insisted. “We must find out about your brother.”

“Oh, hang George! It’s Lucy I need!”

Miss Higgins got a firm grip on her arm. “Be a good girl now,” she said, pulling Barbara along.

“You’re spoiling everything!” Barbara cried. “We were going away together!”

“Sh-sh-sh! Don’t fuss. It only makes it worse.”

The only light in the study came from a reading lamp on the table beside George’s chair. The chair faced away from the doorway, but George’s left arm could be seen hanging loosely over the arm of it.

“Don’t wake him,” Barbara begged. “Please, not until I find Lucy.”

“Come along, dear,” Miss Higgins replied, tugging at her.

Barbara twisted loose from her grasp. “I’ll tell!” she said angrily, hurrying toward the chair. “You don’t even know what to say. You weren’t ...”

She gasped, horrified.

“What is it?” Miss Higgins asked, waddling forward.

Barbara screamed wildly. George’s mouth was slack, his head tilted crazily to one side. The scissors protruded from his chest.

“Oh ... Oh ... Oh ...” Miss Higgins gasped.

Barbara continued to shriek—but no sound came from her throat. It was as if she were having a nightmare. She knew she was screaming, as if she could see the terror in her own face, yet at the same time she realized that she was silent and calm, almost numb.

“Police ... the police!” Miss Higgins murmured, hurrying from the room.

Barbara heard a giggle. She looked toward the sound and saw Lucy in the large mirror above the fireplace.

“Why were you frightened?” Lucy asked her. “You know I wouldn’t leave you.”

Unable to speak, Barbara pointed to the scissors stuck in George’s chest.

“I did it for you, luv,” Lucy told her. “Now, you’re free. Good heavens, why are you so horrified? It’s what you would have done if

you'd had the courage, isn't it? Of course it is."

Miss Higgins reappeared. "The line's been cut!" she said. "Oh, Barbara! Barbara! Do you realize what you've done! Oh, Lord!"

Barbara tried to tell her that it was Lucy who had killed George. But her shock was such that she could not form words.

"Got to get to a phone!" Miss Higgins said, departing. "Don't move! Stay right there!" Then she was gone again.

"Stupid old hen!" Lucy said. "You're free of her now, too, luv," she told Barbara. "Free of all of them, in fact. From now on, it's just you and me. Oh, what fun we'll have! Can't you picture it! What a lark!"

"Now, do you understand why I have to see a lawyer?" Barbara said to Foster. "The police say I killed George. My own brother—they say I killed him!"

Foster was awash in perspiration, the result of his close identification with the patient and the horror she had felt when she discovered her brother murdered.

"Why?" he asked, straining to speak.

Barbara rose and walked slowly toward the vanity. "My fingerprints were on the shears," she replied. "But that's a silly reason. They were my shears. Of course my fingerprints were on them."

"If Lucy handled them last, though ..."

"You sound like the police!" Barbara said sharply, interrupting. She sat down at the vanity and looked appraisingly at her reflection in the mirror. "See? What good are you? I told you, I need a lawyer not a doctor. A lawyer will defend me. He'll understand that it was Lucy who did it."

"But how could ..."

The image in the mirror was gradually changing. The expression on the face became confident, aggressive. The lips smiled derisively.

"You want to know how she could kill him and leave my fingerprints on the shears?" Barbara asked. "How should I know? Ask her. She's here."

Flabbergasted, Foster could only stare at what he knew was Lucy's reflection in the mirror.

Foster turned to Max. Unable to speak, he pointed toward the mirror, needing the orderly's confirmation before his mind would accept what his eyes were seeing.

Looking puzzled, Max faced toward the mirror.

Foster, too, gazed at the reflection. And shock was compounded by shock. The image in the glass was Barbara's. Lucy had vanished.

“Yes? What is it?” Max asked.

“I saw ... That is, I thought ...” Foster closed his eyes and shook his head. “I was mistaken ... It’s nothing ... nothing ...” he said. His mind had played a trick on him, he was sure. There was no Lucy and there never had been. He raised his head and opened his eyes and peered at the reflection again. It was Barbara’s. “I’ll talk to you again about this—later,” he said to her, rising.

“Why bother? You don’t believe me.”

Foster indicated to Max that he was ready to leave, and the orderly moved toward the door. “It’s not that I don’t believe you,” he said to Barbara. “I’m sure you’re telling me the truth—as you see it. Maybe, if we talk again, though, you might change your mind about what is true and what just seems true. There’s a difference.”

Barbara’s expression tightened. She did not reply.

“Later ...” Foster said, walking toward the door.

He heard a low, mocking laugh. Looking back, he saw that Barbara’s expression had not changed. The laugh, he realized, had been Lucy’s.

“Going or staying, Doctor?” Max asked.

Foster hesitated another second, then proceeded. “Going ...” he said.

Max closed the door behind them when they reached the corridor, then slipped the key into the lock.

“Was there a George?” Foster asked.

“Don’t you know?”

“I’m not absolutely positive. I think there was. Was he murdered?”

“If there was a George,” Max replied, smiling, “he may have been murdered.”

“But there was no Lucy.”

“There may not even have been a Barbara,” Max replied.

Foster nodded toward the room. “Meaning that she may be Dr. Starr?”

“Yes, sir.” He looked at Foster closely. “What was it about the mirror that you wanted me to see?” he asked.

Foster had the queasy feeling that the orderly was playing a part, speaking lines that had been rehearsed.

“Because Barbara claims that’s where Lucy is now—in the mirror,” Max replied matter-of-factly. “She’s told me that several times. So, I thought—” He smiled once more. “Did you see Lucy in the mirror?”

“No,” Foster answered positively. As he had told Barbara, there was a difference between the truth and what seemed to be the truth, and

Lucy's face in the mirror, he was sure now, had been nothing more than an illusion.

"Have you made your choice yet?" Max asked, smiling.

"Frankly, I don't think it's any of the first three," Foster replied. He looked at Max sideways. "I'm beginning to wonder if there is any such person, as a matter of fact. Maybe your Dr. Rutherford is playing a little game ... a prank ..."

"Dr. Rutherford doesn't play games," Max replied levelly.

"If he did—would you tell me?"

Max grinned again. He shook his head.

"How many more are there for me to see?" Foster asked.

"Just one."

"Then the choice?"

"Yes, sir ... then the choice."

MANNIKINS OF HORROR

Max stopped at a door and put a key he had taken from the loop into the lock.

"Tell me about this one," Foster said.

"He calls himself Byron. Dr. Byron."

"Doctor?"

"That's his claim," Max replied, pushing open the door.

The room was a surprise to Foster. It was much larger and considerably more impressive than the others. The walls were painted a bright white, and, except for the barred window and a cot, the room looked a great deal like a laboratory. The shelves on the one wall held what appeared to be a comprehensive collection of medical books. There was a long worktable in the center. A human skeleton, the kind found in doctors' offices, stood in a corner. A number of charts were pinned to the wall beside it.

Seated at the end of the worktable was a man in a smock. He was distinguished-looking, with prematurely gray hair. And he was completely unaware that visitors had arrived. Bending forward at the table, he was working diligently at some task. Foster could not see what it was because the man's hands were in the way. Near him, though, Foster could see several small tools, and, resting on a cloth, a mass of modeling clay.

"Byron ..." Max said.

The man raised his head. He was startled at first to see Max and Foster, but then he smiled genially.

"Gentlemen ... welcome ..." he said.

"I've brought Dr. Foster to see you," Max told him.

Byron looked pleased. "I'm always happy to meet a colleague," he said. "Dr. Foster ... I don't believe I know the name ..."

"I'm new here," Foster said.

"That explains it."

"What is your speciality, Doctor?" Foster asked, advancing slowly toward the table.

"Physician, neurosurgeon, orthopedics," Byron answered. "And lately," he went on, "I've found still another specialty—even more fascinating." He began rising. "Would you care to see some of my

recent work?" he asked.

"Why, yes ..."

Byron moved past him to a large wall cabinet that Foster had not noticed before. "Over here," he said, opening the cabinet's double doors. "I think you'll find this *most* interesting ... most captivating ..."

Foster joined him. On display on the shelves of the cabinet were a half-dozen-or-so toy robots. Except for their faces, they looked like the mechanical toys that Foster had seen for sale in shops. The heads, however, had been modeled from clay, and each one had individualized features.

"Yes ... very unusual," Foster said. "Are the faces modeled from the faces of actual people? I get that impression."

"And you're correct," Byron replied. "Former colleagues of mine. Of course, I had to do the modeling from memory. But, I did quite a good job of it, even if I do say so myself."

"Well ... it's ... an interesting hobby ..." Foster said.

Byron cackled, amused. "Hobby! Oh, it's more than a hobby, Doctor. Look closely."

Foster bent forward and examined the faces carefully. There was something strange about them, but he could not figure out exactly what it was.

"Well?" Byron said.

"Evidently I'm missing something ..." Foster said.

"The eyes—can't you make it out? Those eyes were made to see! To function! Inside each skull is a perfectly proportioned brain, entirely capable of working! Marvelous, isn't it?"

Foster looked at him, scowling. "You talk about them as if they were alive."

"That's the next step," Byron told him. "From playthings to creations. *Living* creations!"

Foster smiled wanly, humoring the man.

"You don't think it will ever happen, do you?" Byron said. "The Bible tells us that the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground. Do you believe *that*, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid I put more faith in science," Foster answered.

"What the devil do you think this is if it isn't science?" Byron said crossly. "It's science at its zenith!"

"Mmmmm, well, there are different—"

"The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life!" Byron said excitedly. "Thus the man became a living creature. Doctor, if I could breathe my consciousness into one of these figures, that figure

would come alive!”

“If—” Foster said.

Byron shrugged, calm again. “All things are possible,” he said. He closed the doors of the cabinet. “Do you want to see what I’m working on now?”

“Yes, if you want to show me,” Foster replied, still humoring the man.

They returned to the worktable, and Byron picked up the object he had been concentrating on when Foster and Max entered the room. It was another robot.

“Your latest effort, eh?” Foster said.

Byron smiled softly. “Call it my final creation.” He held the figure near Foster so that he could see it closely.

“It has *your* face,” Foster said, startled.

“Yes. My face ... all of me ... Correct to the smallest detail.”

“It *does* look like you.”

Byron put the robot back on the table. “It is me. I could turn it on and you’d say, ‘Oh, yes, it works on batteries.’ But would you really know what’s inside, Doctor? Not unless you did an exploratory.”

“What is it inside—if not batteries?”

“Me!”

Foster reached for the figure. But Byron put a hand on his arm, stopping him.

“Not yet,” Byron said. “You’re right—now, it’s only a toy. But the time will come, Doctor. By the force of concentration, I shall will my mind to enter its body.”

“And then it will be you?”

“Exactly.” He sat down at the table. “Rutherford wouldn’t believe I can do it,” he said sourly. “That’s why he has me locked up in here. He made one mistake, however. He let me keep my toys. Occupational therapy, he calls it.” His expression became satanic. “But he’ll find out ...”

Foster looked at him sympathetically for a moment, then turned away and walked toward Max, who was standing near the door.

“That’s right—go!” Byron shouted after him. “Run! Hide from the truth like that idiot downstairs!”

Foster paused and faced him again. “Do you understand what you’re suggesting?” he asked. “You’re proposing to put yourself in the place of God—to create a living, human being.”

“And why not?” Byron asked. “Humans kill humans. Taking life—that’s supposed to be God’s prerogative, too, isn’t it? How can you

accept killing, but be put off by an act of creation?"

"I *don't* accept killing," Foster replied. "No more than I accept this idea of yours that you can ..." He interrupted himself. "This is preposterous, arguing with you," he said, moving on.

"There you go—running again! But it won't do any good! Tell Rutherford that, too! It won't do any good! I'll succeed! I will!"

Max opened the door.

"I will!" Byron bellowed.

Foster stepped out into the corridor. Max followed, then closed the door and locked it.

"That was a mistake," Foster said. "There for a moment, I took him seriously. I got caught up in his emotional involvement with those toys."

"It happens," Max said.

"But it doesn't usually happen to me. I'm very careful about that. A doctor has to keep a certain distance between himself and his patient."

Max nodded, apparently agreeing.

Foster took in a deep breath, regaining his composure. "That was the last, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, let's go to your office and you can let Dr. Rutherford know that we're finished up here," Foster said.

"We don't have to do that," Max said, leading the way back along the corridor. "I'll use the intercom at the door to contact him."

"A man like Byron can get under a person's skin," Foster said crankily, trailing along a step behind the orderly.

"How's that?"

"He's so cocksure about his ability to breathe life into those idiot toys. It's impossible to reason with a man like that. He's convinced that he can do it and nothing anyone will ever say will ever shake his confidence in himself. It's a pity. A man with a strong will like that could do so much good—if he would use his strength for the right purposes."

"Doctor, he's mad," Max said. "You're talking about him as if he were sane."

Foster felt foolish. Max was right, he realized. It was ridiculous to think of Byron in normal terms. He hadn't reacted to any of the other patients in that way. Why only to Byron?

They reached the electronically operated door. Max pressed the button on the intercom box attached to the wall.

"What shall I tell Dr. Rutherford?" Max asked Foster.

“Tell him I’m coming down to see him.”

There was a faint crackling sound from the intercom, then Max spoke into it. “Dr. Foster wishes to leave, sir. He’s coming to see you.”

Rutherford’s voice was heard. “Very well—I’ll be waiting.”

A buzzing sound followed, and the metal door slowly opened.

“There you are,” Max said to Foster, smiling amiably.

“Thank you for your help,” Foster said, stepping through the opening.

“No trouble at all—my pleasure, Doctor.”

Foster halted. “You haven’t asked me if I’ve made my choice,” he said. “Aren’t you curious?”

“Yes, I’m curious,” Max replied. “But it isn’t my place to ask. And, too,” he said, “I’ll probably be better off if I don’t know.”

“Why is that?”

“It’s a matter between you and Dr. Rutherford,” Max explained. “I’d rather not mix into it. You doctors have the responsibility for operating at Dunsmoor. What you do, the decisions you make, are none of my business. Remember, sir, I’m an orderly. My job is to follow orders, nothing more.”

Foster laughed lightly. “Max, you’re not *just* an orderly,” he said. “You’re the *perfect* orderly.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Foster turned to go.

“Sir—” Max called after him.

“Yes?” he answered, halting.

“If I’m not being too personal, sir, I’d like to wish you luck.”

“Thank you,” Foster replied, touched.

Max watched Foster through the small, barred window in the door as he proceeded along the corridor toward the stairs. He saw Foster pause when he got to the steps. The young doctor seemed to be looking down along the series of framed engravings that lined the stairway wall. Then, after another moment, Foster continued on his way. He descended the steps slowly, however. And when he got to the first engraving he paused once more.

The faint crackling sound came from the intercom again. Max went to it and pressed the button.

“Yes, Doctor?”

“It’s past seven, Max. Is dinner being served?”

“The food should be on its way up, Doctor. I’ll check.”

“Please do. If we’re going to have order here, we must keep to the schedule.”

“Yes, sir.”

As Max walked along the corridor toward the dumbwaiter, he heard the clanking of the mechanism. The schedule was being kept; the food was on its way up. He found a tray waiting when he reached the dumbwaiter. After raising the grating in front of the opening, he removed the tray, and sent the dumbwaiter down for another.

Carrying the tray of food, Max proceeded to the door of Byron’s room. He unlocked it and entered. He was mildly surprised to see that Byron was lying on his cot, apparently asleep. He had expected to find Byron still fuming, after the heated exchange with Foster.

More important, though, was what Max did not see. As he crossed to the worktable with the tray of food, the robot that Byron had fashioned in his own image emerged from the darkness and, moving in jerky, mechanical steps, headed for the open doorway. As Max turned away from the worktable after placing the tray on it, the robot exited into the corridor.

Max, too, left the room. He closed the door and locked it, then walked back toward the dumbwaiter. Unseen by Max, the robot followed. Reaching the dumbwaiter, Max opened the grating and extracted a second tray of food, which had arrived during his absence. He then closed the grating and, carrying the tray, set off in the direction of Bonnie’s room.

The robot stayed behind. When Max was out of sight, it began climbing a strip of molding that ran upward from the baseboard to the dumbwaiter. It was a difficult climb for the tiny mechanical man. But it succeeded. Reaching the grating, it hid itself in a corner behind the framework. The dumbwaiter, which had descended after Max took the second tray from it, could be heard rising again.

Max returned a short while later and took the third tray from the dumbwaiter. When he closed the grating and departed, the robot leaped onto the platform that ascended and descended carrying the trays. As it landed, the platform began lowering, taking the robot toward the main floor.

At the bottom of the stairs, Foster halted. Passing the engravings, he had again been appalled by the cruelty they depicted, although not as severely as the first time. After a few minutes, he gained control over his inner anger and continued on his way. Approaching the door to Dr. Rutherford's office, he looked beyond it to the entranceway. The nurse was back at her desk. She looked up as Foster neared Rutherford's door.

"Dr. Rutherford is expecting me," Foster told her. "Max spoke to him from upstairs."

She nodded.

Foster tapped on the door, then opened it and entered. Rutherford, as before, was seated at his desk. He raised his eyes from the papers in front of him as Foster appeared and looked at him speculatively.

"So ... you've seen the patients ..." Rutherford said.

Foster closed the door.

"Well? What do you think?" Rutherford asked.

"I think it's a disgrace," Foster replied grimly. "This institution ... the way it's run ... everything about it—a disgrace!"

Rutherford looked annoyed.

"Have you ever looked closely at those engravings you have on the wall on the stairs?" Foster asked.

"I have, yes—not lately, though. Why?"

"Because Dunsmoor is not much of an improvement over those barbaric times," Foster told him. "You still lock patients up instead of trying to treat them."

"Foster, you're talking about an artist's conception," Rutherford replied. "We deal with reality here. Each of those patients you saw has been adjudged insane—and dangerous—by psychiatrists and a court of law. *That* is the reality we have to deal with."

"Is that an excuse for doing nothing to help them?"

"You forget—they're incurable."

"How do you *know* that?"

"Experience. Take a man like Byron," Rutherford said. "Do you think you could rid him of his delusions? He wants to be God. What would you do? Talk him out of it?"

"I would be willing to try to let him talk himself out of it," Foster replied.

"You'd fail," Rutherford said flatly. "Byron is hopelessly insane." He picked up a small leather instrument case and snapped it open. "There's only one way to rid Byron of his hallucinations," he said. He lifted a small, gleaming surgical scalpel from the case. "With this," he said to Foster.

"Surgery? Prefrontal lobotomy?"

"Exactly."

"You think surgery is a substitute for psychiatry?"

Rutherford placed the scalpel on the desk, near the edge. "It's effective," he replied.

"Yes! Effective in turning human beings into vegetables!" Foster said heatedly.

"Isn't that an improvement? Vegetables have no tortured memories. The way those patients are now, they're in constant pain—mental anguish. The knife," he said, indicating the scalpel, "could rid them of that."

"Psychiatry might do the job, too," Foster argued.

"Might. With the knife, there's no doubt. It never fails. I see no point in discussing this any further, though," he said. "You have your theories and I have mine and never the twain, as they say, shall meet. So, let's—"

There was a light knock at the door.

"Yes?" Rutherford called out.

The door opened. The nurse was there, wheeling a tea cart, on which there cups and saucers, sugar and cream, silverware, a pot of steaming tea, and a plate of sandwiches.

"Right on schedule," Dr. Rutherford said, pleased.

The nurse wheeled the cart into the room, and Rutherford began scooting his chair around toward the front of the desk.

"And now—your choice," Rutherford said to Foster.

Foster was surprised. "You'd still give me the job?" he said. "In spite of our differences?"

Rutherford shrugged. "Why not? If you choose correctly, that is. You might do some good here," he said, examining a sandwich.

“Cucumber,” the nurse said to him, indicating the sandwiches.

“Yes, I see. Plenty of salt and pepper, I hope.”

“Just the way you like them, Doctor. Will there be anything else?”

“No, thank you.”

The nurse departed, closing the door.

“Will you join me?” Rutherford said to Foster.

Foster shook his head. “No. I’m leaving.”

“Oh? You won’t choose?”

“No.”

“At least stay for tea,” Rutherford said.

Foster shook his head again.

“You disappoint me, Doctor,” Rutherford said, filling a cup.

“Because I refuse to play your game?”

“No, because you admit defeat.”

“Defeat?”

“You can’t identify Dr. Starr—that’s obvious. You would if you could, I’m sure. That would put you one up on me. It would, to your mind, prove your superiority over me.”

On the lower shelf of the tea cart, the robot that had escaped from Byron’s room came out of hiding from behind a stack of white linen napkins. It moved silently toward the wheel of the cart.

“Confess!” Rutherford said to Foster. “That is why you’re leaving, isn’t it? You’ve failed the test.”

“Test!” Foster snapped angrily. “Damn your test! I’m not a schoolboy! I’m a qualified physician!”

Spoke by spoke, the robot climbed the wheel.

“Qualified physician, eh?” Rutherford said coldly. “Well, clearly, you’re not qualified to practice here.”

“If you insist on selecting your staff in this unorthodox way—playing games—then I can only agree,” Foster countered.

Rutherford sighed. “I was hoping you would understand ...”

Having reached the top of the wheel, the robot raised its hands above its tiny head and grasped the edge of the desk and pulled itself upward.

“I understand only one thing,” Foster told Rutherford. “Those patients are badly in need of therapy. And you won’t help them. You won’t even give them a chance to help themselves.”

Silently, the robot crossed the top of the desk, going toward the scalpel that Rutherford had left near the far edge.

“On the contrary,” Rutherford replied to Foster. “I give them every

opportunity to work out their fantasies.” He sipped his tea. “Perhaps I shouldn’t even do that, though. Take Byron, for example—”

“His work is remarkable,” Foster said. “The man has a fine mind. It’s off the track, yes. But it could be put right, in time, with therapy.”

“His work is remarkable. I agree with you on that,” Rutherford said. “But it’s also dangerous.”

The robot reached the scalpel and lifted it from the desk top, staggering for a moment under its weight.

“Dangerous how?” Foster asked.

“A danger to him,” Rutherford replied vaguely.

Holding the scalpel like a sword, the robot began the long trek back across the top of the desk.

“Perhaps I should put an end to it—destroy those figures,” Rutherford said.

“That might make him even worse.”

“Or cure him,” Rutherford said. He picked up a sandwich and bit into it. “Mmmmm ... good ...” he said. “Just the right amount of salt and pepper. Sure you won’t try one?”

“We’re discussing Byron,” Foster replied sharply.

“I don’t think there’s much more to discuss. The decision is made,” Rutherford said. “It’s time to take Byron’s toys away from him—forever ...”

As he was about to speak again, Foster saw the tiny head and shoulders of the robot rise up directly behind Rutherford. He stared in disbelief. Then he caught sight of the blade.

“Look out!” Foster shouted.

The warning came too late.

The robot thrust upward with the scalpel and sank it deep into the back of Rutherford’s neck. Rutherford grunted, surprised. His head fell forward. The sandwich dropped from his fingers, the cup of tea crashed to the floor.

“Nurse!” Foster yelled.

Rutherford’s body toppled forward and sprawled onto the floor.

As Foster watched, stunned, the robot leaped to the tea cart, then began scrambling down the wheel.

Foster reached out and plucked it from a spoke. Holding it tightly, he stared at it in horror. It had Byron’s face!

“Devil!” Foster screamed.

He hurled the tiny figure to the floor. It landed and lay still. Enraged, Foster raised a foot. He brought it down with all his strength, crushing the robot beneath it. There was a whimper—then silence.

The office door flew open.

“What—?” the nurse began, rushing in. She saw the body of Dr. Rutherford sprawled on the floor. “What happened?” she asked, shocked.

“An accident,” Foster told her. “Get over there to the desk,” he said. “Press the button on that control system and keep it down.”

“But ... Dr. Rutherford ...?”

“It’s too late for him—he’s dead!” Foster replied. “Do as I told you—or more of us may die. There’s a whole army of killers upstairs. I’ve got to destroy them.”

Looking totally baffled, the nurse went to the desk.

“Remember—keep that buzzer buzzing!” Foster told her, hurrying from the room.

Foster raced up the stairs. As he reached the second-floor landing he could hear the buzzing. The massive steel door, he saw, was standing open. He ran along the corridor and dashed through the opening, then halted and pressed the button on the intercom.

“Nurse!” he shouted. “You can stop now! I’m inside!”

The buzzing ceased and the door slowly closed.

Turning from the intercom, Foster saw Max standing in the doorway to his office.

“Max! Quick!” Foster called out. “Byron—We’ve got to stop him!”

Looking puzzled Max hurried to meet Foster, getting a key from the ring.

“What is it?” Max asked. “What’s the matter?”

“I’ll explain later—there isn’t time now!” Foster said.

Together, they ran along a corridor to Byron’s room. Reaching it, Max quickly unlocked the door, then stepped back. Foster rushed into the room.

“He was asleep a few minutes ago,” Max said, trailing after Foster. He pointed toward the cot. “Yes, there he is. He’s still ...”

Byron was not still asleep. He was dead. His body was mangled, almost flat, as if it had been crushed by some enormous weight.

“I—I don’t understand—” Max said, shaken.

“I do,” Foster said. “That is, I do—yet I don’t—” He put a hand to his eyes, shutting out the sight of the mangled body. “I killed him ...” he said, turning away.

“You? How could you ...?” Max shook his head. “I have the only key to the door. You couldn’t have got in here without me knowing it.”

Feeling weak, Foster sat down in Byron’s chair. “Somehow, he breathed life into that robot,” he told Max.

Max peered at him skeptically. “Doctor, you’ve seen too many patients today. I think if you rest—”

“No. No, I’m all right,” Foster said. “I know it sounds ... insane ... That figure that Byron made in his own image ... it escaped from this room ... it got into Dr. Rutherford’s office ... and it murdered him ...”

“Dr. Rutherford is dead?”

“Yes. That robot ... it stabbed him with his own scalpel. I saw it.”

“Dr. Foster, that’s difficult to believe.”

“It happened!” Foster insisted. “I caught it. I had it in my hand. I saw its face—it was Byron. I should have kept it. But ... I felt such rage ...”

“What did you do?”

“I threw it to the floor and I ...” He shuddered. “I stomped on it ...”

Max looked toward the crushed body on the cot. He stared at it for a second then faced Foster again.

“Doctor,” Max said, “perhaps you’d like to lie down in one of our vacant rooms.”

“What the devil are you saying!” Foster flared. “Are you suggesting that it didn’t happen? That I’ve lost my mind?”

“No, sir. Of course not, sir,” Max replied. “I just thought ... a little rest ...”

Foster rose. “I don’t have time for rest,” he said, heading for the doorway.

Max hurried after him. When they reached the corridor, Max halted to lock the door.

“Is that necessary—now?” Foster said crossly. “He won’t be wandering around. That, Max, is the end of Dr. Byron Starr.”

“Max looked up at him. “He is your choice?”

Foster nodded. “It’s obvious,” he said. “He mentioned that Dr. Rutherford had locked him up. He had a great hatred for Rutherford. The others said nothing to me at all about their keeper.”

“That didn’t occur to me,” Max replied, impressed.

“That’s not surprising—you’re not trained for that sort of thing,” Foster said. He turned away from the orderly and moved along the corridor.

“Where are you going?” Max asked, hustling after him.

“To your office—to call the police,” Foster replied. “There’s been a murder!”

Hurrying, Max got ahead of him and stopped in the open doorway to the office, blocking the way.

“What now?” Foster said crankily.

“Doctor, think—. When you tell the police that Dr. Rutherford was murdered by a tiny robot, what do you expect their reaction will be?”

Foster scowled.

“A robot that had life breathed into it by a madman,” Max said.

“But it happened!”

“Did it? Maybe there’s some other, more logical, explanation. Did

you believe Bonnie's story? Or Barbara's? Or Bruno's?"

"That's entirely different. I *saw* this happen!"

"The police didn't."

Foster hesitated. Max was right. Neither he nor the police had believed Bonnie, or Bruno, or Barbara. It was doubtful that the police would believe his story, either.

"Where is your proof that it happened as you say it did?" Max asked.

"The robot! It's still down there in the office!"

"A crushed toy? Do you really think the police will accept a tiny mechanical figure like that as a murderer?"

"But, the nurse. She saw ..." The nurse, he realized, had seen nothing.

"The police will believe the obvious," Max told him. "You and Dr. Rutherford were alone in his office. Dr. Rutherford was murdered. The only logical conclusion they'll be able to reach is ..."

Foster shook his head, not wanting to hear what Max was about to say.

"Please, Doctor ... for your own good ..." Max said. "Take some time and think about it ... Lie down in one of the rooms and—"

"No!" Foster shouted. Max thought he was mad. He would lock him in the room and never let him out. "Out of my way!" he raged, shoving the orderly aside.

The office was small, painted an off-white. Foster saw a file cabinet, a battered desk ... There was a phone on the desk. As he hurried toward it, he caught a glimpse of a hospital cart. Snatching up the phone, he started to dial. But his attention was drawn again to the hospital cart. It had a body on it, covered by a sheet.

Foster looked back over his shoulder at Max, who was standing just inside the doorway. Max smiled softly.

"Who is that?" Foster asked, indicating the body.

Max's smile widened. He did not reply.

Foster put the phone down and went to the cart. He pulled back the sheet, revealing the body of a young man. The face was purple, the expression contorted.

"This man has been strangled—" Foster said, horrified.

"Yes, two days ago," Max replied calmly. "I haven't had a chance to dispose of the body."

"Dispose? Who is he?"

"His name was Max. He was my orderly."

"Then, you're—" Foster began, shocked.

“Yes. I’m sorry, but your guess was wrong. Byron wasn’t Dr. Starr. I am.” He moved forward, his smile broadening, becoming a fiendish grin.

Foster knew he ought to try to escape. He knew exactly what was going to happen to him if he didn’t. But his body would not respond to the commands of his brain. Frozen by fear and horror, he watched in a daze as the hands of the man he had come to know as Max reached for his throat. He managed a small squeal before the fingers began to tighten. Then he had to discard even the notion of crying out. The fingers shut off his breathing, and Foster felt life slipping away.

Standing at the steel door, Dr. Starr pressed the button on the intercom.

After a second, the nurse responded. "Yes?"

"The buzzer, please," Dr. Starr said.

On cue, the sound was heard. The door slowly opened. Dr. Starr exited, walked along the corridor, then descended the stairs. He smiled, amused, at the engravings along the wall as he moved downward.

The nurse was scrubbing the spot on the rug where the tea had spilled when Dr. Starr entered the office. There was no other evidence in the room that anything unusual had occurred.

"Good ... good ..." Dr. Starr said, commenting on her efforts.

"I don't think it will show after it dries," she said, rising.

"Let's hope not." He glanced toward the desk. "Everything else seems to be in order ..."

"Yes, Doctor. I straightened up."

The sound of the knocker at the entrance door was heard.

"I'll get that," Dr. Starr said. "I imagine it's for me." He paused on his way to the office door. "There's a job for you upstairs—two of them," he said to the nurse. "Why don't you take care of it now? I'll be needing the office."

"Yes, Doctor."

Dr. Starr moved on. He left the office and crossed the entranceway past the utilitarian desk to the door and opened it. A fresh-faced young man stood outside.

"Good-evening," Dr. Starr said cordially.

The young man nodded, returning the smile. "I have an appointment," he said. "It's about the advertisement ..."

"Ah, yes ... I've been expecting you. I'm Dr. Starr." He stepped back. "Come in ... come in ..."

The young man entered and stood waiting.

Dr. Starr closed the door. "Mustn't leave it open," he said. "I detest drafts ..." He led the way toward the office. "I have your credentials and I've looked them over," he said. "You appear to be highly qualified—on paper."

"I haven't had a lot of experience, but I've had excellent training,"

the young man said.

“Well, we’ll soon find out how expert you are.”

“Oh? Do you have some special means?”

“I was thinking of a test of some sort,” Dr. Starr replied, leading him into the office.

“Test? Of what sort?”

“Oh, I don’t have anything specific in mind,” Dr. Starr answered. He smiled softly. “But, between the two of us, I’m sure we can think of something.”